

















# **Mr. Johnbull Speaks Out**

*By*

**R. C. RAWLLEY**

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*It may seem strangely unconventional but I  
must come out with it. In all sincerity.*

*I dedicate this book*

*to*

*my wife*

*Doris Victoria*

*who, despite the unusual vicissitudes of life,  
has always kept the home fires burning.*



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*The unusually tense atmosphere of Indian politics and social life in nineteen thirty-seven offered unlimited scope for the presentation of the realities of life in the form of an unorthodox political novel. There was no sense in adding to the legion of dry-as-dust literature already available in the market on the plaintive outpourings of Indian politicians and the glorious achievements of British statesmen in the so-called uplift of the masses. The only alternative was to depart from the time-honoured convention and to give the public a connected story of the distinctive aspects of Indian life as they unfolded themselves to the observant eye of an eminently respectable and impartial Englishman of the neo-liberal school.*

*The manuscript of this book was commenced and completed in nineteen thirty-seven, but owing to certain unexpected developments, its publication was withheld for some time. Although, during the last three years, India along with the rest of the world has witnessed sudden changes in her political and social structure, the fundamental background of the story (and its bearing on India's national problems) has retained its previous shape and significance. Who knows what will happen after the present war? Who knows what New World Order will force itself on our national life? Whatever happens and*



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*whatever New Order comes into being one thing is fairly certain, and that is that India will play a very impressive part in shaping the New Culture of mankind.*

*Following the usual convention I might as well emphasise here that characters and incidents portrayed and described in this book are the products of my imagination and do not bear any relation whatsoever to living persons and actual events.*

MURREE  
JUNE 21, 1941

R. C. RAWLLEY

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**PART ONE**  
**THE COSMOPOLITAN PORT**



## CHAPTER I

### MR. JOHNBULL ARRIVES

The incoming Mail Boat to Bombay was unusually late on the 13th of November, 1936. Thursday had already passed, and early on Friday morning, the passengers on board S.S. "*Inconia*" sighted the Gateway of India. The anticipation of the joy of walking on terra firma and of meeting friends, relations, and admirers, stimulated the passengers into finishing their final packing long before the arrival of the boat in the harbour. There was a general call for cabin stewards and luggage porters. Early risers were already in the dining room sipping their morning coffee and munching their early morning toast. There was an atmosphere of great activity all over the gigantic steamship. Soon after the rising of the eastern sun, the "*Inconia*" came to a standstill alongside the Ballard Pier and received cheerful greetings from the crowd assembled on the landing stage.

There are outgoing and incoming mail boats of which the public at large take no notice. There are outgoing and incoming passengers who leave or come back to the shores of India without disturbing the peace of mind of anyone outside the inner family circle. But this particular mail boat was different from all other mail boats, inasmuch as she was fortunate in having on board a galaxy of chorus girls, a small group of glaringly conspicuous Indian Princes, a large crowd of successful students and research scholars, a mixed batch of Government officials and Army Officers, a bunch of fortune-seekers, and a notable member of the British Parliament.



There was something deeply fascinating about the groups of men and women walking hurriedly on the main deck, or leaning leisurely against the railing and gazing into the crowds standing patiently and expectantly on the quayside. All grades of society, all shades of colour, and all kinds of professions were represented among the incoming passengers.

The most prominent among them were a few noble members of the princely order, universally known as the Ruling Chiefs of the Indian Empire. In keeping with their dignity and wealth they had with them several individuals known as "members of the suite," or in other words, hired servants of education and Western culture whose chief duty was to keep their princely masters properly amused during their travels in Europe, and to provide such comforts and pleasures as are generally demanded by wealthy travellers in any part of the world.

The foremost member of the princely group was a tall and handsome man of middle age, who had left his quasi-independent territories early in April to study the dictatorial methods of administration in some of the highly advanced countries of Europe. His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar was apparently a brilliant man, not only in administration but also in social diplomacy. Having obtained first-hand knowledge of dictatorship, he retired into a terraced villa on the *Côte D'Azur* with his favourite mistress of Caucasian origin and left the administration of his state to the generous discretion of his ministers. A week before his departure for India, he was reported to have delivered an important speech in Geneva on the virtues of Divine Rule and Dictatorship. The press reporters of Bombay were keenly awaiting the arrival of the "*Inconia*" for full details of His Highness's views on this important subject.

The other members of the princely order were petty Nawabs and Rajas whose wealth and endless spending power enabled them to acquire a certain

popularity amongst the demi-mondes and brothel-keepers of Paris, Vienna, and Bucharest. Being of a sporting disposition and having booked a fairly large stock of champagne of special vintage, they had succeeded remarkably well in keeping the chorus girls in good humour. Traces of debauchery and sex-exhaustion were clearly visible on their young faces. It seemed as if they were not very anxious to return to their homes, and to the unpleasant conventions of social and political life.

Next in order of financial and imperial importance were a few elderly Englishmen, whose dress and demeanour indicated that they were the "Burra Sahibs" of old-established mercantile firms in Bombay, or Calcutta or Madras, who had gone to Europe to get away from the sweltering heat of May and June, to negotiate fresh commercial agreements in foreign capitals, and to discuss some new projects with the Directors of their Home Boards. The worries of commerce and burdens of big business had obviously driven them to the spas and mineral springs of Carlsbad and Baden. They showed neither signs of fatigue nor the black circles of mental worry around their eyes. Through the combined effects of medicinal waters and harmless social recreations they had gained not only in physical fitness but also possibly in grabbing capacity.

Commerce in its more blatant form was represented by a very large number of European and Indian commercial travellers who had joined the "*Inconia*" at Port Said after having chased across continents in search of gullible customers and wholesale dealers. They carried bags full of neat samples of underwear, stockings, lavender bottles, perfumes, lipsticks, face powders, depilatories, and a large variety of mentionable and unmentionable articles of retail and wholesale trade. They were all dressed in well-tailored clothes and were particularly smart in appearance. They had all enjoyed immensely their voyage out to India and had never stopped drinking till the closing time. Their oft-repeated

smutty tales had given the old maids on board a new interest in sex life. They were now on the verge of "doing" India with their hand-bags and sample boxes.

In one corner of the main deck, somewhere near the smoking lounge, stood a small group of British and Indian officers of His Majesty's civil, military and medical services, who had gone to England either under the benefits conferred upon them by the "Lee concessions", or on study leave for a prolonged period. The importance of their official positions was writ large on their faces. The Ballard Pier, the luggage porters, the noises of hawkers, the moaning of beggars, and the faces of Customs officials reminded them once again of their duties and responsibilities for the maintenance of law and order in their respective areas. Weather-beaten and sun-dried, they were a class by themselves. It was not for them to waste time and energy in the lighter side of life, or to lower their prestige by mixing freely and humanly with anyone outside the rigid circle of their own services. They had returned to India with new academic and professional qualifications for promotion to higher ranks, and they had made up their minds to go straight back to their jobs in the interior, without wasting the usual parting "cheerios" on their plebeian fellow passengers.

And there was also on board a large crowd of Indian students who had returned to their mother country with British degrees, after being away some four or five years, with intermingled spells of hard work and dissipation to their credit. They had studied all imaginable subjects, such as geology, minerology, electrical and radio engineering, technology of sugar, oils and fats, ceramics, art and architecture, medicine and surgery, accountancy and actuarial science, law and literature, psychology and psychiatry. While going through their courses of instruction, they had also acquired some knowledge of Western social and political institutions. Some of them were healthy young men of athletic appearance; others were barnacled gentlemen

• who seemed to have spent tiresome days in research laboratories and industrial workshops. There was an air of dignified responsibility on their faces, and a touch of self-reliance in their conversation. They formed an integral part of the new phase, -the phase which moulded India's industrial destiny into a modern shape.

The fortunate few among the passengers who had friends and relations in Bombay, were looking anxiously for a nod or a smile from the waiting crowd below the gangway. Flowers and garlands and other tokens of regard and affection were being waved in the air in response to the waving of hats and shouts of laughter from the upper deck.

The passengers belonging to the fair sex could easily be divided into two distinct classes. The first included the young wives of British Officers and commercial magnates, who had left for Europe in April last to escape from the enervating effect of the hot weather. They had obviously enjoyed themselves thoroughly and possibly heart-breakingly in Brighton, Eastbourne, and other seaside resorts in England and France. After having reached saturation point in matters of love, luxury, and change of scenery, they had returned to India to rejoin their anxious, and perhaps lonely, husbands. In spite of palatable food, stimulating wine, and a round of amusements, all of which are abundantly available in seaside resorts, these young "grass widows" looked tired and spent out. Probably, the after-effects of the farewell night on the "*Inconia*" were still visible on their young faces. Through the air, kisses were flying from the anxious husbands, and in the same aerial fashion, the seemingly anxious wives were throwing back their loving glances from the promenade deck.

With the exception of three or four old maids who had come out to India as matrons of hospitals and fashionable nursing homes, the second category included young dancing damsels of the international Hastic Review Co.—an entertaining organisation set up and

arranged by an enterprising Anglo-Brazilian for the mental and moral uplift of the sex-starved humanity residing in India and remote colonies of the British Empire. Although only thirty in number, these young ladies out-rivalled the rest of the female population of the boat in attracting the attention of the males. They represented many different nationalities from Europe and America and possessed a wide range of artistic and acrobatic talents. There were amongst them Russian tip-toe dancers, Italian acrobats, rag-time singers, and specialists in the Rhumba, the Tango and other hip-swinging dances of Mexico and South America. They had a wonderfully exciting voyage from Marseilles, and were now looking forward to a successful season at the Grand Opera House in Bombay. Dressed in beautiful day frocks, painted in the ultra-modern fashion, and coiffured in the latest Parisian style, they were waving their handkerchiefs and hands to their Publicity Manager who was standing almost on the edge of the quayside panting for breath and trying to steady his little fat body. His assistant was carrying a basket of roses and carnations to present to the beauties of the "International Review".

The "*Inconia*," and her passengers were not altogether free from the attentions of scientific crooks, confidence tricksters, card sharpers, and white slave traffickers. But since their history, description and reputation were known only to a certain branch of the Criminal Investigation Department, and since no member of this international fraternity had been caught red-handed on the voyage, it was impossible to recognise them in the crowds and groups gathered on different parts of the main deck for the purpose of getting ashore as quickly as possible.

The lowering of the gangway into position enabled some adventurous reporters to board the famous steamship. And then followed a long line of human beings—anxious parents, ministers of Indian States, long-parted husbands, loyal clerks of mercantile offices,

servants of civil and military officers, press photographers, publicity agents, guides and touts. Within ten minutes, the steamer was flooded with visitors carrying garlands, flowers, and notes of introduction to eminent personalities.

In the middle of this rushing crowd, an elderly Parsi gentleman wearing the traditional Zoroastrian hat, which looked something like an inverted boat, and followed by a lean office assistant carrying a heavy load of specially selected and artificially scented flowers, was pushing his way with breathless haste. After having covered a few paces in this manner, he reached the head of the staircase leading downwards to the Purser's Office. At this point, he met the Chief Deck Steward, from whom he enquired as to where he could find a first-class passenger named Mr. Horatio Johnbull.

The enquirer was soon ushered into the magnificently furnished drawing-room of the "*Inconia*." Reclining in an arm-chair and glancing over a type-written sheet of paper sat Horatio Johnbull. Although he was a very distinguished passenger on the mail boat, by some chance or other, he had been left undisturbed by the crowd of press reporters thronging the passages on the main deck. The Parsi gentleman who was no longer wiping the perspiration off his forehead, nor panting for breath, advanced a few steps into the state room. Approaching the reclining figure in a slow and deliberate manner, he bowed courteously and made ~~dis~~spisingly a brief introductory speech.

"I hope I have the privilege," he said, "of meeting our honoured guest Mr. Horatio Johnbull, M.P.. My name is Sir Cursetji Todibacha, and I am the President of the Society for the Promotion of Imperial Relations. As you are well aware, sir, our organisation is popularly known all over the British Empire as the "*SPIRE*." I have been authorised by my Committee to welcome you on behalf of our one hundred and one members, who, individually and collectively support the Imperial cause. You must have received our cable

communication, inviting you to our annual meeting which we have specially arranged and advertised for the 16th of November."

The tall Englishman listened to Sir Cursetji's neat little speech with keen interest. Looking at the type-written sheet of paper which gave a list of his engagements in Bombay, he stretched out his right hand and said, "I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Sir Cursetji. I received your kind invitation at Aden and have already jotted down the engagement in my diary. I hope you won't insist upon my speaking at the meeting."

Sir Cursetji, after assuring his honoured guest that it would not be necessary to call for a speech, drew out a large bouquet of white and pink roses bordered with lilies and decorated with marigolds from the basket of flowers held in readiness by his assistant, and presented it to Horatio Johnbull as a token of imperial goodwill and Oriental hospitality. "My motor car and my humble services are always at your disposal," he said with a winning smile on his hardened face.

Accompanied by Sir Cursetji and his assistant and followed by a small army of porters, Horatio Johnbull walked over the gangway and passed through the Customs barrier in less than a quarter of an hour. In another fifteen minutes, he found himself in the sitting room of a beautiful suite facing the Gateway of India, and reserved for him by Sir Cursetji, who was a member of the Board of Directors of the company controlling the gigantic palace of luxury, known in the East as the Mumtaz Mahal Hotel.

In the privacy of his bed room, lying comfortably and relaxingly on a large bed after a fairly substantial lunch, Horatio Johnbull closed his eyes, and mentally reviewed the events of the last thirteen days. He reconstructed the scenes of his social contact with the peoples and princes of India on board the "*Inconia*". He thought of the refreshing moments spent in the charming company of the young damsels of the

International Hectic Review Co., and of the hours wasted in futile discussions with civil and military officers on political topics of the day. He visualised the enthusiastic optimism of commercial travellers under the exhilarating influence of beer and whisky, and the hopes and expectations of the young Indian students who had laboured hard for years to equip themselves for a technical career in the land of their birth. After a voyage full of new mental and physical experiences, he imagined himself moving about from place to place in a different world, in search of still more new ideas and new sensations. Overwhelmed with fatigue, he receded from the world of reality into the endless spaces of dreamless sleep.



## CHAPTER II

### WHO IS MR. JOHNBULL?

The princely suite occupied by Horatio Johnbull faced the sea, and a continuous cool breeze blew into the sitting-room throughout the day. The rooms comprising the suite were furnished in the most modern style. All the comforts of mechanised life such as, shower baths, ceiling fans, bed-side telephones, writing tables, low arm chairs, ottomans, divans, curtains and carpets, and chromium-plated fittings, were provided by the management as essential parts of their "inclusive charges". In so far as the routine of hotel life was concerned, there was not much difference between the East and the West.

Everyone in the smoking lounge of the hotel was asking: "But who is Mr. Horatio Johnbull?" A very brief paragraph about his arrival was published in the "Pride of India" on Saturday morning, and soon after the appearance of this public reference, the rolling ball of curiosity was set in motion by some journalist who had failed to secure an interview with the eminent member of the British Parliament. Urgent inquiries were made from the leading political lights of Bombay, and from some of the Burra Sahibs of mercantile houses who had just returned from Europe on the "*Inconia*". In less than forty-eight hours after his arrival, Horatio Johnbull was described, sketched, and psycho-analysed by an incorrigible press reporter who was noted for his dynamic imagination and personality.

This journalist began his account with a negative portrayal, and then went on to a description of the

more positive side of Horatio Johnbull. "He is not one of those monocled, irresponsible and over-clad Englishmen," he wrote in his racy style, "who visit India for a brief period of social diversion, nor is he the proverbial John Bull, who is depicted in the foreign press as a stiff-necked, whiskered gentleman with a smile of contemptuous tolerance on his face. He is not conservative in politics and imperial affairs, nor is he as devout and pious-looking as a church warden.

"On the contrary," continued this pen picture, "Mr. Horatio Johnbull is an eminently respectable citizen, like any other respectable citizen of London or Manchester. He is tall, nearly six feet in height, and possesses a very attractive personality. Fluent in speech, and polished in manners, he creates a favourable impression without the slightest effort on his part. Although he is in his early forties, he has managed to preserve his youthful appearance. He was brought up under the strictest parental control of a Lancashire millionaire. His father, Sir William Horace Johnbull, clung to the tory traditions of his class throughout his life; but his son has obviously shaken off the shackles of conservatism by adapting his political outlook to the ever-changing structure of society. The Senior Johnbull honestly believed that the only method of multiplying his millions was to keep a firm hold on the Indian market. With this idea at the back of his mind, he consistently advocated the old 'Rule Britannia' policy in all matters connected with Indian administration. The Junior Johnbull is, however, different from his father in this respect. He has no desire either to multiply his inherited millions, or to persist in his father's rigid conservatism. He has a perfectly open mind on the Indian question, and is seriously desirous of reading the inner meaning of the present political situation in his country."

• After describing the reactions produced by Horatio Johnbull's association with people of advanced schools of political thought at Oxford, the journalist went on

to discuss the influence of Fabianism on the outlook of the younger generation just before the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, and then resumed his biographical sketch.

"His entry into His Majesty's forces during the Great War, and his first-hand knowledge of the horrors and sufferings of trench life on the Western Front, made him peculiarly susceptible to the grievances of the Labour Party. Being intellectually immature at that time, he refused to accept whole-heartedly the views and programmes of the various socialistic organisations in Great Britain. A little later in life, he began to appreciate the sense of comradeship and the honesty of purpose of those who stood behind the mass movement of industrial workers."

The writer next indulged in a little psycho-analysis. "Mr Horatio Johnbull", he continued, "indulges in the mild pleasures of life, as and when opportunities of social and sexual recreation present themselves. He believes in moderation, in a balanced method of living. He is emphatic on the question of 'balanced consistency,' not the abnormal consistency of an automaton but the rational consistency of a man who has learnt his lessons in the field of life.

"He condemns hypocrisy in society, sex, religion, and politics. He has managed to overcome the acquired prejudice of the white man against the alleged inferiority, incapacity, and immorality of the so-called coloured races. He has no use for the trumpery pomp of the old aristocracy, and for the 'divine right' of the white races to 'civilise' the backward nations. Subconsciously he is a strong supporter of the strength of the Empire, but consciously he believes in the autonomy of the various units comprising it."

Commenting on the possible objects of Mr. Johnbull's visit to India, the journalist built up a nice little story out of the few hints given to him by a Bombay politician. "This is not his first visit to India", he wrote with an air of being in the know. "He came

out to Bombay for the first time in 1920, when his father Sir William paid a business visit to our City to untangle some of the problems created by the Rupee-Sterling exchange fluctuation in our piecegoods market. He was then young and inexperienced, and could only listen to the commercial jargon of merchants and dealers about the colossal losses they had suffered through the unexpected depreciation of the pound sterling in terms of Indian currency. After his father's death in 1932, Mr. Horatio Johnbull entered Parliament from a textile constituency, and his interest in Indian affairs increased substantially from that year. He is now anxious to study on the spot the preliminary reactions of the New Constitution on the people and princes of India, to understand the real difficulties of the situation, and to form an independent judgment as to the possibilities of the future.

"It is indeed fortunate for both India and England that Mr. Johnbull is not one of those gouty, rheumatic, liverish and short-tempered Englishmen who come out to India in their dotage, to get warmed up in Bombay and shrivelled up in Delhi, and after travelling in mail trains and living in exclusive hotels during the month of January, leave behind a record of irrelevant and unreliable 'facts' about the 'civilising' burdens of the white man in the tropics. Being both vigorous and sensitive, he combines humour and sympathy with an intelligent appreciation of the habits and customs of the people with whom he intends to come in contact during his stay in this country. He does not shrink from driving through the Indian bazaars, nor avoid shaking hands with an Indian workman; for he realises that the dangers of infection are greater in the crowded halls, ballrooms, and restaurants of European capitals than in the narrow streets of Lucknow, or in the hands of an honest labourer of Delhi.

• "In short, Mr. Horatio Johnbull is thoroughly human, and humanly sympathetic. If he were a superman he would make his visit a dismal failure. But sane

and balanced as he is, he is sure to make a phenomenal success of it".

Before mid-day on Sunday, the question: "But who is Mr. Johnbull?", had been satisfactorily answered. The whole of educated India knew that a distinguished member of the British Parliament had arrived in Bombay for the purpose of making an independent study of political and social movements in India.

Saturday night was a gala night in Bombay. The famous Kalbadevi Road, the central "rough-house" of speculation in gold, silver, linseed, and cotton, was ablaze with multi-coloured electric bulbs. Every shop and every house on that road had been decorated, distempered, and incensed for Diwali celebrations. It was the night of worship, not of kings and princes, nor of gods and heroes; but of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth.

Apart from its historical, and mythological importance, Diwali night is regarded as the beginning of the Hindu Commercial Year in many parts of India. Gold and silver coins are exchanged amongst friends and business houses, and specially prepared sugary sweets are distributed amongst relations and intimates. New clothes are worn, and ornaments are displayed on this auspicious night. Fresh account books and ledgers are opened with the sign of *Swastika* on the front page, and with entries of new business on the second. Even the Bombay Stock Exchange is open to business for a couple of hours at night, in honour of the goddess of riches. *Moorat*, or New Year's transactions, are made in shares, securities, linseed and wheat, jute and hessians, cotton, yarn and cloth; so that the ceremonies connected with the worship of Lakshmi may bring wealth and prosperity to her votaries throughout the forthcoming year.

Partly to save his guest from boredom in a strange city, and partly to show him an Indian religious festival, Sir Cursetji Todibacha called at the hotel at 8-45, on Saturday night. Horatio Johnbull, with his newly-made

Parsi friend drove in an open car towards the local stock exchange. He watched the hustle of brokers and sub-brokers, jobbers and dealers, and clients, going in and out of the New Exchange Buildings, carrying slips of papers with notes of transactions done in the evening. Young men and old, clad in spotlessly white dhoties, and long coats, or in white satin drill trousers and a short black jacket, soaked in perspiration and hoarse in voice, were clamouring for quotations, shouting out prices and jotting down deals in popular scrips. From outside, the central hall looked more like a frantic pandemonium than like a well-organised stock market. Even the 'bear-raids' outside the Royal Exchange in London were more peacefully conducted than the "bull drives" inside the Bombay Exchange. But since they were all trying to make money out of a common pool, their sins of "commission" and confusion were pardonable.

From the Stock Exchange, through Hornby Road, Horatio Johnbull drove down to the real centres of Bombay's commercial activity the Marwari Bazaar, where crores of rupees change hands every year, where buyers and sellers from all important inland towns congregate on this auspicious night to meet their *Adityas* (commission agents), where any imaginable commodity can be bought and sold on forward contract, and where Lakshmi is truly adored, worshipped and fêted on this particular occasion. The capricious Goddess, however, like "the eternal female," does not bestow her favours upon everyone. Only the favoured few find fortunes in the Marwari Bazar; the majority of worshippers leave behind their hard-earned money long before the night of worship is over.

The slow drive through the Marwari Bazar was instructive for Horatio Johnbull. The mobile commercial wealth of India was passing from hand to hand before his own eyes. Thousands of packages of dhoties, drills, muslins, and longcloth, with "Made in England" labels were being bought and sold by Punjabi dealers

and Marwari merchants, by mysterious signs of hands and fingers. The volume of business concluded on Diwali night indicated the real trend of commerce, and was regarded as an accurate pointer of the purchasing power of the people. Horatio Johnbull at once realised that no economist or statistician could afford to ignore this religious-cum-commercial festival. Irrespective of castes and creeds, it was the real commercial pulse of India. It was apparent to him that the success or failure of commercial enterprise depended, to a large extent, on the correct understanding of fairs and festivals of this nature throughout the length and breadth of the Indian Empire.

After three hours of driving and sight-seeing, Sir Cursetji felt exhausted. Horatio Johnbull was also beginning to feel the strain of continuous noise and blinding illumination. After dropping his guest at Mumtaz Mahal, Sir Cursetji drove back to his palatial mansion situated on the higher range of Nepean Sea Road.

## CHAPTER III

### A LITTLE FLAG WAVING

On Monday, the 16th of November 1936, at 5 p.m., the Empire Hall, Bombay, was resounding with human voices. This huge structure was originally conceived, and later donated and completed by the supporters of the Empire Movement. Since the main objects for which the Hall was built were the promotion of imperial relations, and the fulfilment of India's destiny as member of the British Empire, the question of the artistic beauty of the facade had not apparently arisen. The result of indifferent planning was that the final structure represented an odd mixture of neo-Gothic and Indo-European styles. There was a confusion of art, architecture, history, and sentiment, in the very appearance of this temple of imperialism. The only redeeming feature was that the auditorium provided comfortable accommodation for nearly three thousand people. The spacing of seats was so arranged that even the most distant member of the audience could hear clearly.

• • In addition to the one hundred and one members of the "*Spire*", invitations had been accepted by a large number of distinguished non-members. Leading merchants, landlords, and title-holders, also attended the meeting. Although a large section of the people was opposed to the policy and ideals of the "*Spire*", out of sheer curiosity, men and women of all shades of opinion had flocked to the Hall, to witness the proceedings, and to listen to the presidential pronouncement. It was therefore a great day for the members of the "*Spire*" who hoped to enlist a fresh batch of recruits.



Exactly opposite to the main entrance, and right across the auditorium, a door on the left of the raised platform opened into a small reception room, in which the President received his guests and members of the Governing Body. Horatio Johnbull and a fellow guest, called Dr. Eknath Mudiliar, were both cordially welcomed by Sir Cursetji, and introduced to Sir Timothy Warburton, Sir Haroon Rashid, Sir Vijay Mahalakshmi, and Mr. Arthur Frown—four sturdy pillars of imperial wisdom, and champions of imperial unity.

The proceedings commenced at 5 p.m., sharp. Headed by their President, Sir Cursetji Todibacha, the members of the Governing Body and the two distinguished guests marched out of the reception room in a single file, and occupied the seats of honour allotted to them by the Secretary in charge of the function. The one hundred and one members cast their smiling eyes on the dais, clapped their hands, and cheered their leaders. The President rose from his imperial chair, looked around, returned the complimentary smiles, took a few sips of iced water from a glass bottle on the table in front of him, and addressed the audience.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, "I hope you will realise that I have a difficult task before me this evening. To make matters easy, I shall not bother you with the details of our activities during the past year. You will find these in the pamphlet which is being circulated by our able Secretary."

A brief pause, another few sips of iced water, and Sir Cursetji continued his speech in a lipping voice. "My main object in speaking to you this evening is to deal briefly with India's New Constitution, which, as you are already aware, comes into force on the First of April, 1937. It seems to me there is no sense in rejecting a gift which has been given to us by a benevolent Government."

• Cheers from the members and sneers from the opposition.

"I am not disturbed by your sneers, Gentlemen," said Sir Cursetji. "I am a plain man, and I believe in plain facts. Under the present conditions,—in which we live, I cannot help advising my countrymen, and also those Britishers who stand by us to face the facts. And what are the facts? They are known to you all; they are naked facts—facts which clearly show that, even during the last war, we would have been subjected to humiliation and conquest but for the proud, brave, and selfless protection of the mighty British Navy."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the one hundred and one members of the "*Spire*."

"Yes, I repeat, Ladies and Gentlemen, that India is an integral part of the British Empire, and that no one can protect her hoards of silver, gold and jewels, against the onslaught of Communism, better than the British Army and Navy. I ask you: who will guard her frontiers, and her endless coast line in the next war? Who will protect her helpless children, and her helpful merchants against poison gas and dreadful bombs? Who will give her citizens a peaceful and progressive administration? I am sure you will agree with me that, there is only one answer to all these questions. And that answer is "The British Navy."

"Certainly not," shouted a batch of girl students occupying a back row in the Hall.

"My dear Ladies," continued Sir Cursetji, "there is no sense in denying the facts, and the British Navy is a fact. I do not wish to introduce a personal element into my speech; but since it is a fact, I do wish to point out that, during my business connections with the Mercantile Marine and the British Navy, extending over a period of thirty years, as a supplier of Indian condiments and miscellaneous stores, I have never come across greater gentlemen and greater citizens than the Officers of the various ships with whom I have had to deal from time to time. I may not be a university-man, but I can assure you that I can handle men and affairs better than any commerce graduate."

Loud cheers and complimentary "hurrahs" from Sir Cursetji's personal friends and admirers.

Encouraged by the renewed and deafening cheers of his friends, Sir Cursetji resumed his speech more vigorously than ever. "If we can handle the Englishman courageously and diplomatically in business," he said, "why can we not handle him properly in administration?"

Though short and podgy, Sir Cursetji never gave way to breathless panting. Fortified by another big gulp of iced water, he continued his speech:

"There is scope for good work in the New Act. We are moving steadily towards partnership in the British Empire. We must thank the British Government for these beneficial changes in our status. We are helping our countrymen in South Africa, Australia, and Canada. Under the new regime, we shall secure better rights for them.

"Gentlemen! and I should not forget our lady friends in this appeal, I request you most sincerely to set aside personal differences, and to support the New Constitution. By our loyalty, we can win for ourselves full Dominion Status in time. I do not wish to take up more of your time. We have, in our midst, this evening, our wellknown and respected supporter, Sir Timothy Warburton, who will now give you the benefit of his considered views."

The one hundred and one members of the "*Spire*" raised a boisterous chorus of applause. Two hundred and odd neutral listeners acknowledged the speech with subdued hisses, and the remaining audience remained silent out of politeness.

To arrive at a just estimate of the vehement appeal made by Sir Cursetji, one must know something about his personal life. Unlike Parsis of great political and intellectual eminence, he was a self-made business man who had acquired financial wisdom and commercial cunning in the sordid battles of life. He had received neither a proper dose of liberal education, nor an overdose of culture. Having had no opportunity of indulg-

ing in athletic sports, he had allowed his body to grow into an unbecoming mass of flesh. Being only five feet and three inches in height, he derived his dignity and prestige more from his frontal protuberance than from his amiable personality. As he was nearing fifty-five, he did not adopt the casual mannerism of the modern young man.

He inherited from his father only one asset, and that was a strong business connection with the Mercantile Marine, and the British Navy in eastern waters. He was, as everyone in the East knew, a Naval Contractor who had amassed an exorbitant fortune during and after the war. He supplied chutneys, condiments, curry powders, and readymade bottled spices to common sailors, able seamen, naval cadets, naval officers, commanders of the mercantile fleet, and also to the officials of the Port Authority.

Like many other successful business men, he was generous towards those who had been instrumental in building up his fortune. He never displayed a moment's hesitation for the supply of free beer to all the ranks of the Navy on Empire days, and on other occasions, nor did he ever stint in providing funds for the Imperial Cause. It was his pride to admit somewhat blushing, that, even in the thick of the world-wide depression, he was able to secure a substantial profit in the manufacture and supply of Empire chutneys, Indian condiments, and Orient spices. There was no need for him to advertise, as there was a constant demand for his appetising goods.

Although he was fast approaching the back door of old age, he had no moral scruples in matters concerning sex. He sincerely believed that human flesh could be bought and sold like beef and chutneys. To him the temporary sexual needs of young naval officers and middle-aged commanders were of the utmost importance. He was therefore immune from any qualms of conscience while catering for the sensuality and sexual perversions of his patrons. He even

encouraged and willingly arranged midnight orgies in ports of call; so that the name and "sporting" reputation of "Cursetji Todibacha" was passed from ship to ship, and from port to port. Though personally beyond the normal sex urges of man, he was not averse to keeping company with his naval friends during these nights of diversion.

His political creed was derived entirely from his commercial associations. His fear of losing his wealth under any other than the existing British administration haunted him. His success had placed him in the enviable position of being invited to join the Boards of iron and steel, cement and sugar companies. Through British patronage and Indian flattery he had acquired the status of an industrialist. He dreaded the idea of losing his directorships through a socialistic government, which might alter the internal structure of industry and commerce. To fortify himself against all these unpleasant possibilities, he had gone out of his usual business paths to organise the Empire Movement.

Sir Timothy Warburton, the next speaker was affectionately called "Timmy," by the girls. He was the senior partner in India of Messrs. Brooks and Barks Ltd., of London, Manchester, Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, Colombo and Singapore. This well-known Eastern firm acted as managing agents for several joint stock companies, which controlled railways, mines, cement factories, cotton and jute mills, shipping fleets, fisheries, bakeries, laundries, hotels and restaurants, cinemas, and even amusement parks where mechanical gambling for strictly charitable and profitable purposes was not tabooed by the local or provincial police. There were not many aspects of commerce which Brooks and Barks Ltd., neglected to study for the prosperity of the premier European mercantile house in the near East.

Sir Timothy joined the firm as a poorly-paid assistant at the tender age of twenty in the year 1906. In those days, and for years after, he lived in a

"chummery" with jovial colleagues. With his meagre income he was unable to maintain his dignity as a Chhota Sahib in the firm, and to pay for his whisky bills in the Club. He therefore lived mostly on debts, and on a few unexpected cheques from a wealthy broker in the local Stock Exchange, who himself made considerably large sums of money in gambling on Sir Timothy's secret tips.

Commercially speaking, Sir Timothy was always quick in judgment, and quicker in making profitable bargains. In twenty years, he managed to secure a small partnership, and in thirty he found himself at the top of the firm in India. By dint of energy and intuition, he waded his way through the muddy swamps of commerce to the Chairmanship of the Western India Chamber of European Commerce. Prior to his election to this high position, he had been knighted by the Government for services rendered during the difficult period of the war, and also during the darkest days of the civil disobedience movement. He was regarded by high officials as a unique symbol of Imperial commercial unity.

In private life, he was a confirmed bachelor who lived for the pleasures of the moment, and also for pleasures likely to give him additional vigour for making money. He loathed the "unscrupulous native trader," but worshipped the Indian millionaire with large liquid financial resources, who might be tempted to join the directorate of one of his companies. And since he believed in the worship of the Bitch Goddess, he did not mind associating freely and fraternally with his Indian friends whom he entertained lavishly in his luxurious flat in Palace Chambers. His country cottage in a beautifully wooded corner of a small forest within motorable distance from Bombay, was often utilised for merry week-ends, and "cock-and-hen" parties. He had no use for the highly educated and cultured Indian who could speak the English language with an accent

better than his own, and could wear Western garments with more dignity.

In business life, Sir Timothy was a dynamic force. "High Finance" was his gospel and practical creed. He believed in making big profits by investing other people's money in big enterprises, and in earning large commissions and brokerages for the premier house of Brooks and Barks Ltd. He was flamboyantly proud of the fact that his firm handled nearly ten crores of Indian money every year and kept the pace of industry going fast. Their own income was barely twenty lacs a year, which, after all, represented only two per cent of the total turnover. If at any time, an Indian shareholder raised a cry against the abnormally heavy expenses, at a general meeting, the Chairman, (Sir Timothy himself) called the grumbler to order with the remark that the cost of living of an English manager must necessarily be higher than that of an Indian superintendent. The former must have his whiskies every evening, his beer occasionally, his bridge and billiards now and again. Sir Timothy did not believe in the transfer of financial reserves of the firm from one branch to another. Let the weak branch pull through the period of depression by borrowing locally at cheap rates of interest. His pet financial formula was: "India's money must be invested for India's benefit." Brooks and Barks were there to look after the investments.

In political life, Sir Timothy was a great English patriot. He was the chosen mouthpiece of the Progressive European Party in the local legislature. He made stirring speeches on matters relating to public finance and rural welfare, and supported any measures likely to increase the purchasing power of the masses. He advocated the Indo-British exploitation of India's industrial resources. He did not seem at all clear as to the difference between business and politics. In public meetings he declared that politics had nothing whatever to do with the commerce of the country; but

in the meetings of the Western India Chamber, he insisted upon the suppression of the Freedom Movement. They, by which Sir Timothy meant the house of Brooks and Barks, were a band of pioneers who had risked their lives and fortunes in uncertain enterprises in the past, and deserved fair treatment at the hands of the ruling powers. He was strongly opposed to the exploitation of Indian markets by Italians, Germans and the Japanese, and for this reason, he was constantly preaching the gospel of Indo-British unity.

After Sir Cursetji's speech, the audience was curious to know something about the views of the great British magnate, who was regarded in certain circles as the nerve-centre of Bombay's financial life. Sir Timothy rose from his chair, moved towards the front of the dais, placed his left hand on the lapel of his coat, and commenced addressing the audience in a steady business-like voice.

"Sir Cursetji, Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, "I'm glad to have the opportunity of expressing my views on a subject which is engaging the attention of the best brains of our country. But before I dwell upon the problem before us, I suggest that, in all matters of political compromise, it is always best to forget past bitterness. After all, in a family of five members, there are bound to be differences of opinion, which under emotional strain develop into acts of physical violence."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the front-row Europeans. Sir Timothy was pleased with himself for this philosophical utterance. He raised his voice in response to this appreciation.

"We are all members," he continued, "of the family, known throughout the world as the British Commonwealth of Nations, and as such, we may have resorted to unkind deeds and unpleasant words in the past. I appeal to those of you who carry influence with the people of this ancient land to forget the past, and to strive for a happier future."



A young English press reporter who was jotting down the speech in shorthand exclaimed: "Well said! Sir Timothy."

"You are all well aware that, after great deliberation and investigation, the British Parliament has, at long last, fulfilled the pledges given to India by Queen Victoria, of blessed memory, and by the leading statesmen and politicians of Great Britain. This great country is now placed on the royal road to full responsible self-government. Being a plain man of business though an ardent advocate of the expansion of Indo-British trade, I'm not qualified to discuss the legal implications of the Government of India Act of 1935. Let lawyers and professional politicians fight amongst themselves on that score. What I'm concerned with is the improvement in the purchasing power of the masses, and I honestly feel that, under the new Act there is scope for the Ministers of the Crown to develop trade and agriculture, and to raise the standard of living."

The members of the audience in the Hall were now getting accustomed to his stock phrases. They listened to him in silence while he continued his speech on the same stereotyped lines.

"There may be shortcomings in the Act, there may be imperfections. Neither the shortcomings nor the imperfections justify the rejection of a measure which has been passed by our Parliament to give India another instalment of self-government. Extremists and socialists, jeer at those of my Indian colleagues who join hands with me in promoting imperial unity. They call us traitors and sycophants. I ask you: is it fair to use such terms against those who are working for the democratic uplift of your country?"

"It is easy to talk about independence, but it is difficult to achieve it and retain it. Before the eyes of your own people, Abyssinia has been ruthlessly conquered. Spain is going through hell and is said to be in danger of being forcibly occupied by some

ambitious European power. I am sure you would not like to be trampled upon by a foreign power!"

Loud cries of "No, certainly not" greeted Sir Timothy's last remark, from different parts of the Hall. He did not break the thread of his argument, but continued:

"Britain's armed forces are at your disposal, her shipping services are at your very door, her experts are already tackling your industrial and educational problems, and her best sons are trying their utmost to improve the conditions of your masses. Would you like to throw away these substantial benefits for the mere shadow of a name which might prove fatal to your very existence?"

The speaker was so excited with his own performance that he looked around for smiles and cheers. After a few moments for recalling some of his pet expressions, he resumed his speech.

"I appeal to the common sense of the people. I want them to realise that the future of their great country lies in the joint association of Britons and Indians in the development of their native land.

"As I have already remarked, there have been unpleasant incidents in South Africa, Australia, and in some parts of Canada. There are racial troubles even now in some of our colonial possessions. But I repeat that we should forget these incidents, and strive for happier relations amongst the various members of the Imperial Family. To my business mind, it seems that the only method of achieving the desired end is to support the New Constitution, and to make our Society the real foundation of the new Imperial Structure."

There was uproarious applause from the one hundred and one members of the "*Spire*", when Sir Timothy Warburton resumed his seat. There was a mild outburst of jeering and hisses from the students. There were loud cheers from the business section. The speaker himself was thoroughly satisfied by the mixed

chorus of cheers and sneers, as he could hear only the remarks of the members sitting on the front seats.

The President lifted his cumbrous body once again from his chair, and making a rough mental estimate of the temper of the audience, began another brief speech.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, "I am happy that you have all given a patient hearing to the views so ably expressed by Sir Timothy Warburton on the question of Indian self-government and Imperial unity. I take this opportunity of thanking him profoundly on behalf of the members and myself for his candid and business-like speech. I am sure his words have gone to the hearts of all loyal members of the British Empire.

"I have another pleasant duty to perform this evening, and that is to introduce to you our honoured guest, Mr. Horatio Johnbull, M.P., who has undertaken a long and expensive journey to study the present trend of political thought in India. At my special request he was kind enough to attend this meeting. I do not wish to press him for a speech but I hope that he will oblige us by giving us the benefit of his first impressions."

Horatio Johnbull had listened patiently, though inwardly somewhat amused, to the orations of the President of the "*Syre*", and of his British colleague, the great Sir Timothy Warburton. In view of the promise extracted from Sir Cursetji on board s. s. "*Inconia*", he felt justified in refusing to speak on this occasion. He had no intention of making a fool of himself before an educated and cultured audience by expressing opinions on subjects of which he had no intimate knowledge. His experiences had only just begun. He had not yet sifted the grain from the chaff. He must continue his journey, study the subject, grasp the essentials, and then express his views; if expression of views were necessary. In order, however, to conform to the rules of the political game, he rose from his chair, and addressed the audience.

"Sir Cursetji, Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, "I'm glad to have the opportunity of attending this

meeting, and coming into touch with a large number of Indians and Englishmen of diverse political views. I hope you'll forgive me for not expressing my personal views this evening. I have only just arrived in this country, and my views cannot possibly have any value."

At this point, he turned towards the President and added: "I thank you for having afforded me the opportunity of listening to your speech."

Neither Sir Cursetji, nor his colleague, was spared the usual fire of questions. One of the audience doubted the sincerity of British statesmen in relation to India. Another raised his voice against the inhuman treatment meted out to Indian emigrants in the Colonies. Sir Timothy used his usual tact and shrewdness in appeasing this questioner. Many other questions were hurled at the two, but in each case they managed to get out of difficult situations by evading the real issue.

At 7 p.m., the President declared the proceedings closed. There was the usual rush of cars outside the main gate of the Empire Hall. Those who did not own motor cars boarded tram cars and buses. Some got into horse-driven Victorias and others went home on their push bikes. Inside the Hall, there was darkness and silence long before the last member of the audience left the pavement of the adjoining street.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MAYOR'S TEA PARTY

In a limited sense, the meeting at the Empire Hall had been a great success. It received much publicity the next day. The "Pride of India," the leading daily newspaper of Western India, eulogised the great services rendered by the pioneer manufacturer and supplier of chutneys and condiments to the imperial cause. It went on to predict a new era of prosperity and freedom for India through the unflinching loyalty of Sir Cursetji and his band of workers. Sir Timothy Warburton was praised as the herald of a new commercial age, in which the clash of colour and creed would be replaced by the ideals of imperial unity.

The "Bombay Courier," and the "National Voice," the daily organs of the national party and in sympathy with the Freedom Movement, strongly deprecated the sycophancy and anti-national speech of the Parsi knight, and praised the restraint of the British M. P., who had refrained from indefinite and untrustworthy statements.

Some of the leading lawyers of Bombay who had become hoary-headed in the school of pre-war liberalism, and had even supported the policy of repression in times of disorder, congratulated the President of the "Spire" on his bold stand in defence of the New Constitution. The city fathers, in particular, showed keen interest in the press comments on the proceedings of the previous evening, and discovered a fresh significance in the presence of an eminent member of the British Parliament in their city.

No foreign visitor who has travelled throughout India in comfortably cool weather leaves her shores

without paying a tribute on the one hand to the graceful coast-lines of the Island of Bombay, and on the other to the high standard of efficiency in the various departments of her Municipal Corporation. Students who specialise in the art of Local Self-government regard their studies as unfinished if they do not investigate the system of local administration.

Mr. Kisonadas Balabhai Deshsevak was the first citizen of the Island of Bombay at the time of Horatio Johnbull's visit. He was originally an enthusiastic member of a small group of social revolutionaries, but having drifted into business, and having "made good" in the worldly sense, he gradually severed his connections with his early associates, and acquired what the liberals in Indian politics called a "constructive mentality." In his characteristically constructive style, he ascended the ladder of local fame, and became the First Citizen of the First City of the Indian Empire. Always clad in hand-reeled and hand-woven Indian silks, he was a popular figure at all the functions organised by the city fathers and their civic children.

Everything about the Mayor was constructive. He was constructively proud, and had reason to be, of the Bombay Municipal Corporation. He was constructively socialistic in his outlook, and for this reason he had set apart a considerable fortune for a rainy day. He was constructively nationalistic in his political creed, and for this reason he was always prepared to lead any group of politicians ready to snatch at political power. He was constructively humanitarian, and for this reason he had accepted the leadership of a well-organised labour executive. In short, his constructive tendencies had enabled him to acquire prominence in the civic affairs of Bombay.

Reading the columns of the "Pride of India," on the morning of the 17th of November, the Mayor got one of his constructive brain waves, and decided on the spur of the moment, to give a tea party in honour of Horatio Johnbull, who, according to press reports,

was an important figure in British politics. His characteristically constructive imagination saw the possibilities of useful propaganda and publicity through the latest spokesman of the British Parliament in India. His favourite hobby, the Municipal Corporation, must be constructively advertised through so influential a medium. Like a flash of lightning he got his constructive idea, and like a thunderbolt, he issued his invitations to his friends, political admirers and Municipal Councillors in the following words:

To meet

Mr. Horatio Johnbull, M. P.

The Mayor of Bombay Mr. Kisonadas B. Deshpisevak requests the pleasure of.....'s company at an informal Tea Party, at the Indo-Swiss Restaurant, on Saturday, the 21st of November 1936, at 4-30 P.M.

PRIVATE SECRETARY

TO

R.S.V.P.

THE MAYOR OF BOMBAY

Horatio Johnbull felt neither flattered nor excited about this, but he accepted the Mayor's invitation and looked forward to another instructive and perhaps amusing, evening. He had read and heard about the magnificence of eastern hospitality, and this seemed a splendid opportunity of acquiring first-hand knowledge of the local municipal affairs.

Those city fathers and leading citizens of Bombay who had received and accepted the invitation were happy to have an occasion for meeting a distinguished guest, and also for shaking hands with some of their old friends. The habit of giving receptions and garden parties had become so popular in Bombay that a week without some such function was regarded as a week of boredom. Amongst the invited there were some who deplored the folly of the Mayor in fixing an important social event on a Saturday afternoon—when the Western India Turf Club provided opportunities for a "flutter" at the finest race course in India. But, as the

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racing enthusiasts were in the minority, the Tea Party did not suffer from lack of numbers.

The lawns attached to the Indo-Swiss Restaurant situated on the grounds of the newly-reclaimed beach of Marine Drive, were decorated with multicoloured buntings. The shrewd and obliging Swiss proprietor, who had become a millionaire in Indian money, by providing refreshments for princes and potentates, democrats and socialists, nationalists and imperialists, knew both the science of cookery, and the art of decoration to a remarkably high degree. He had used his talent in arranging the tables so as to give ample elbow room for the guests to move from one table to another. He provided a wide passage in the middle and several passages on the sides of the large pavilion erected for the occasion. At the northern end, he placed sofas and arm chairs for the Mayor, the chief guest, and the privileged guests of the evening. Knowing the mixed nature of the gathering, our Swiss expert supplied cheese, sandwiches, cakes, and pastries for vegetarians, and meat patties and chicken rolls for those who ate anything barring human flesh.

With true oriental humility, the Mayor received his guests at the main entrance to the pavilion. With his constructive genius, he had made up his mind to make his party the greatest success of the season. He received guests of all nationalities and races. Amongst the Indians, there were Hindus, Muslims, East Indians, Christians from Goa, Parsis, Baghdad Jews, Bene-Israelites, and some prominent members of the newly-discovered caste called Harijans. Amongst the Western nations, there were Englishmen, Scotchmen, Irishmen, Germans, Italians, Frenchmen and Americans. The consuls and vice-consuls of practically all the nations were invited. Even the Ethiopian representative and the Egyptian delegates from a religious university were requested to attend the function. Law and letters, science and philosophy, mysticism and materialism, civil service and diplomacy, arts and aesthetics, commerce



and industry, wealth and poverty, were all represented in the most representative of all gatherings in Bombay.

Each guest, as he alighted from his motor car, or from a hired conveyance, was first received by the Mayor, and then directed to his table by the Private Secretary, who acted as a sort of master of ceremonies. By 4-45 P.M., the tastefully decorated pavilion was filled with over five hundred guests, in spite of a special event of the racing season!

Horatio Johnbull, the chief guest of the evening, was conducted in a dignified and constructive manner to the sofa placed at the northern end of the pavilion. While passing through the central passage, he was introduced to some of the most distinguished citizens of Bombay and also to some of the leading Consular Agents.

Mr. KisonDas was getting a bit impatient with the tittle-tattle of an elderly Parsi journalist who was discussing his reminiscences with Horatio Johnbull on the other side of the sofa. After the chief guest had finished his tea and casual talks with another half dozen chatty citizens, the constructive Mayor pushed himself forward and engaged his attention.

"What do you think of the general appearance of our city, Mr. Johnbull?" he enquired in a mild inviting voice.

"Bombay is not new to me, you know," answered Horatio Johnbull, "I was here once before; in 1920, to be exact. From what I've seen of the city this time, I must admit that there is all-round improvement. New structures have cropped up everywhere, and new building programmes are going ahead. If huge buildings indicate prosperity, Bombay seems to be fairly prosperous."

"I am glad to know that you find signs of improvement everywhere," said Mr. KisonDas enthusiastically. "Our Municipal Corporation is a model institution in local self-government. Unlike Calcutta, we have no communal bickerings here, and no major disputes over

the election of Mayors. There is an old-established convention which entitles every community to give a fair chance to one of its own members. We follow the rotational system which gives equal chances to Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, East Indians, and even Jews, to elect the best man from their respective groups. And the best man, as you must have seen, does his best during his brief tenure of office."

Mr. Kisondas felt thoroughly satisfied with his constructive talk. Horatio Johnbull listened to him patiently, and after a moment's consideration asked him a leading question.

"Is it true that a good few local bodies have been superseded and transferred to official control during the last decade, owing chiefly to nepotism, swindling and corruption amongst the councillors and municipal employees? If what one reads in the newspapers is correct, the introduction of democracy into local affairs is obviously a failure."

The Mayor was at first surprised to hear that foreign newspapers had maligned Bombay. But in view of the correctness of some of the statements published by the press, he adopted an attitude of constructive frankness and related a long story.

"There are instances," he admitted, "of corruption and nepotism in the administration of local affairs, but the real fault lies in the form of democracy which has been haphazardly designed by our rulers. Loaves and fishes are distributed on sectarian principles. Even technical appointments are subjected to communal pressure. Hindu engineers and Muslim doctors, or vice versa, are selected on religious merits for important executive posts. In selection committees, bakers, clothiers, butchers, and even undertakers are called upon to judge the technical capacity of an engineer, or to approve of the medical qualifications of a public health officer, with the obvious result that nepotism and communal favouritism are rife in our civic life."

"In so far as maladministration of funds is concerned, Bombay is certainly above-board. Our accounts are handled by experts whose results are subject to regular audits. Our services are all under expert technical supervision. Our public-utility schemes are not held back for years for want of a quorum. Our methods of working are indeed complicated, and to a certain extent dilatory, but, on the whole, I am sure our administration is second to none in the whole of India. Our sister city on the eastern side is often the victim of party politics and paltry disputes, and her citizens have often gone without necessary public works for years, but we have always managed to avoid such pitfalls."

Mr. Kisonadas had spoken too much. He felt exhausted, and needed a respite. His mind was getting bewildered with visions of publicity. He must bring out the most conspicuous achievements of his beloved child--the Corporation. He sat in a reflective mood for a few minutes, and then resumed his constructive frankness.

"I don't know," he said, "whether you have heard about our successful battle against prostitution and the white-slave traffic. With the assistance of the City Police, we were able to eradicate this dreadful social vice. Vested interests were against us. Evil livers jeered at us, but we never gave up till we succeeded in removing these undesirable human beings from our streets. Thanks to the labours of the city fathers, we are now free from prostitution and all its ugliness."

Horatio Johnbull smiled at the latter part of the statement, for he had been reliably informed that since the advent of the era of morality in Bombay, the so-called white slaves had drifted into newly-erected buildings in the west-end. The white, the brown, and the dusky "slaves" had found more lucrative occupations in millinery and drapery establishments, massage saloons, turkish baths, dancing academies, and schools for masculine deportment. The incidence of venereal

disease on the physical health of the sex-starved "grass widowers" had also increased. After the official abolition of prostitution, young gallivanting fools, shop and office assistants, and middle-aged Burra Sahibs, found it much easier to slip into an apparently harmless house than to motor down to a distant brothel.

The western sky was now turning crimson, and the sun was slowly sinking below the hazy line of the waveless sea. The sandy beach below the main road was beginning to present a busy appearance. Hawkers and pedlars were shouting out their trade cries in different jargons. The Mayor's Tea Party was getting tired of itself. Social gossip was beginning to flag. Conversation had shifted from the exciting "bullish raids" on the stock exchange to commonplaces like the birth of a first-born in a newly-but-happily-married family. The Mayor, the chief guest, and other distinguished guests were moving from table to table, saying good-bye to friends and strangers. Chauffeur-driven cars were coming round to the main entrance of the pavilion, and rich citizens and councillors were driving away from the scene of the Mayor's hospitality.

Horatio Johnbull, accompanied by the Mayor, drove along the Marine Drive towards the Church Gate corner. At the junction of Queen's Road and Reclamation Street, there was a huge jam of motor cars and lorries. All traffic had been stopped by the police. An Anglo-Indian Inspector was standing in the middle of the road, directing an incredibly long procession of young men dressed in dark-blue half-sleeved shirts and belted shorts. They were carrying banners, black flags, and huge placards with such slogans as "*Give us this day our daily Bread,*" "*Do not force us into Violence,*" "*Give us our Dues, we demand nothing more.*" Divided into groups of fifty each, and led by several leaders, they were marching in a peaceful orderly manner. At all important corners, they halted for three minutes, and shouted: "Down with Imperialism," and again: "Down with Capitalism."

From his point of vantage in the car, Horatio Johnbull watched the behaviour of these young men. Although prolonged unemployment had driven them to demonstrate, they had not lost their mental balance, nor given up their passive principles.

Mr. Kisonadas explained to him that they were members of the Society for the Protection of Educated Workers, commonly known as the "Spew." In semi-military fashion, they were marching to the *Oval* to attend a demonstration organised by the headquarters of the Society. They represented all classes of technical men who had qualified themselves for various professions in India, Great Britain, Germany and America, and were unable to live in decent circumstances on account of long-drawn-out unemployment. In spite of the fact that business was already better and industry was beginning to pay dividends, these men could not find suitable jobs and through sheer starvation were forced to accept poorly-paid clerical work.

"Their grievances are legitimate," explained Mr. Kisonadas in a sympathetic manner. "The only action that the Government has taken so far is to import foreign experts to revise our educational system, and to devise improvements in vocational training. The committees appointed in previous years were useless. The majority of members were not able to suggest practical methods of helping these unfortunate men, whose parents have spent fortunes on their education and training. Radical changes must be introduced in our industrial and commercial methods; otherwise, I am afraid, there will be a terrible class war in this country within the next ten years."

The members of the "Spew" marched on towards their destination, and after half an hour, traffic resumed its normal pace. Mr. Kisonadas, in a very constructive way assured Horatio Johnbull that he would be only too pleased to show him round the various interesting institutions (such as maternity-centres, birth-control clinics and pumping stations) controlled by the Muni-

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cipal Corporation of Bombay. Horatio Johnbull reassured the Mayor that he had not reached that stage of life when birth-control methods and, maternity treatment could be of practical interest.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CABARET

The festive season at Mumtaz Mahal had already begun. The arrival of the "*Inconia*" and her cheerful passengers had added zest and gaiety to the crowds attending the cabaret shows in the gaily-painted and domed reception hall, which had been divided into a lounge and a large ballroom for the convenience of the residents and visitors. At one end of the lounge, there was a cocktail bar--a bar which was quite as modern and refreshing as bars of similar style in Europe and America. At the other end, an automatically illuminated stage had been erected for the players of the jazz band specially engaged for the winter season. The dancing floor between the stage and the southern end of the smoking lounge served as an open space for acrobatics and other performances.

The variety programme of the cabaret was international in character. There was a Hindu girl of about twenty-three years, who had specialised in classical Indian dancing, and had adapted some of its rhythmic pantomimical movements to the requirements of a western orchestra. She was of medium stature, and had jet black, languorous eyes with a delicate touch of acquired modesty. Her performances were invariably encored by the cultured artistic set, who strongly advocated an historical background in the revival of mythological arts.

The other items included a young Russian girl, who had drifted from country to country in search of a suitable life partner, and had taken up cabaret dancing as a means of livelihood. Her efforts to climb the tree

of matrimony, and to find a wealthy old roue who might one day relieve her of the strain and monotony of exhibiting her sensuous limbs every evening, had miserably failed. She was, however, more fortunate in finding a stage partner, a young Irishman, who had lost the major portion of his inherited fortune in Monte Carlo, and had decided to make commercial use of the talents developed during the days of prosperity. This couple gave exhibitions of Mexican and Brazilian dances, and carried on their trade under the name and style of "*Ziska and Zola*," whatever that might indicate.

Another important feature in the programme was a mulatto singer with a powerful baritone voice, who could sing classical and modern songs with equal ease, and who was well known in Bombay where he always received endless encores. Another acrobatic couple, whose ages could not be determined from any facial clues but whose muscular performances indicated early thirties, completed the programme of the evening.

On Monday, the 22nd of November, both the smoking lounge and the ballroom were over-crowded, and every available table around the dancing floor, and near the band stage was occupied. Mysterious cocktails, beer, whisky, and other drinks were flowing freely and copiously. The management was doing good business, and the cabaret dancers were receiving repeated cheers from the visitors. The entire place was lively and humming with human voices. Men and women of the east and the west were paying collective homage to Bacchus. Young Parsi baronets with their richly dressed and fashionably made-up wives, Muslim knights with their sari'd daughters, and Hindu merchants with their gorgeously draped brides and sweethearts, were mixing freely and unreservedly with their western friends and admirers.

Young damsels of the "modern school," with artistically pencilled eyebrows, rouged lips, and bangled wrists were broadcasting their charms through their radiant eyes. Managers and assistants of European



business houses, who had come down to join in the fun after a day's hard work at figures and accounts, were looking for unattached "ladies of high society," and in fact unaccompanied girls of any sort of origin. Brokers and gamblers in smart lounge suits were smoking away the worries of uncertain life. And those who cater for the idiosyncrasies of the idle rich, and act as companions to physically unattractive millionaires were amusing their patrons with smutty tales.

The band was playing Mexican music mingled with American melodies. There was a feeling of unrestrained "sway" in the minds of young and old couples who were doing, rather gracefully, the complicated steps of a modern Rhumba. Indian girls were no less active, nor less attractive, than their western sisters. All eyes were focussed on the heaving bosoms and gyrating hips of a sweet young girl of the north, dressed in a flared sari of pale-mauve georgette and a sleeveless blouse. She was doing a graceful tango with a sunburnt youth of twenty in an unconventional manner. Life was large, and society was at its merriest in this great meeting-place of men and women seeking solace and respite from the worries and troubles of their twentieth century world.

Seated at a table near a large bay window, and enjoying a care-free evening in the company of two English friends whom he had known for years, was Horatio Johnbull. He was in the best of spirits, and like the majority of visitors in the lounge, was in a cheerful mood. He was smilingly commenting on the progress made by young Indian girls towards westernization, and was, at the same time, admiring the graceful way in which they danced with their friends and relations. He was not shocked at the rapidity with which Indian women had freed themselves from the shackles of prudery and unnatural modesty. He felt happy in this lively modern atmosphere.

In the middle of a complimentary remark on the fascinating Russian dancer and her Irish partner, Hora-

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tio Johnbull's attention was drawn by a group of young good-looking Indians seated at a table on his left, near the lower end of the dancing floor. The first person he recognised, as soon as he turned his face towards the adjoining table, was young Jal Feroz, the eldest son of Sir Cursetji Todibacha. The young man had been previously introduced to him by his father, and his face was therefore familiar. As a mark of respect for his father's friend, the young man rose from his chair and hastened towards the table at which Horatio Johnbull and his two friends were seated.

"What a pleasant surprise to meet you here, Sir!" he said as he stood near the table. "I'm sorry I've not been able to pay my respects personally."

Horatio Johnbull offered him a chair and introduced him to his friends who made room for him at the table.

Jal Feroz was distinctly different from his father. He was a handsome young man of about twenty-five, of medium height and olive complexion with sparkling brown eyes and dark brown hair. He was well-built and muscular in appearance and had taken an active part in sports at Cambridge. Against the wishes of his father, he had taken up advanced courses in economics and statistics. He had a keen intelligence and a polished intellect, and was habitually modest and unassuming in his manners. He had acquired knowledge for its own sake, and not for the sake of making money like his father out of able seamen and officers of the British Navy and the Mercantile Marine. Having had daily opportunities of coming into touch with English boys, and having been blandly told that he belonged to an inferior eastern race, he had become impervious to the imperial sermons of his father. He had a clean mind, and even the generous supply of funds and easy access to sexual vice in Europe, could not spoil him. Four years of social pinpricks and occasional snubbing from idiotic snobs made him anti-western.

After Jal's return to India in 1935, he was pressed by his father to join in the family business, to take

active interest in the manufacture of chutneys and condiments, and to help introduce, if possible, new and improved methods. But, to the utmost surprise of the renowned pioneer, Jal Feroz refused to associate himself with the greasy and sour processes of commerce. In less than a year, he found himself in a new social order; an order which his father described as an "undesirable and unprofitable political cult." He became a free-thinker and a rational-socialist. He studied the writings of early socialists with a keen intellectual interest, and was often in the company of labour leaders and political workers.

Since his knighted father found it difficult to draw him into the commercial fold, he tried another dodge to keep Jal away from the influence of anti-imperialists. He suggested a matrimonial alliance with the daughter of a Parsi baronet, who was not only ten years older than Jal Feroz, but was also ugly, uncouth, and viciously conscious of her wealth. Jal Feroz stoutly opposed this proposal, and somehow managed to remain free from the projected matrimonial bliss.

Jal was conscious of the good side of certain aspects of English culture, but he was intolerant of the usual English hypocrisy and patronising attitude towards everything eastern. He was proud of his ancient race, but not of his present heritage. He had no objection to his father exploiting the British Navy, but he was definitely opposed to the exploitation of the vast numbers of Indian peasants and industrial workers by a handful of British and Indian magnates—who valued human labour in terms of "cheapness," and declared openly that "the cheaper the labour, the greater the possibilities of economic and industrial exploitation." As these "hard-headed" business men would never allow human machines to think and act intelligently, it seemed necessary to introduce a new order of things. Jal's intimate study of the Russian revolution had convinced him that the principles of communism as evolved and applied in that country, would never suit Indian conditions. He

believed that some form of socialism, undefined and unshaped in his mind, could be introduced to the country as a whole.

Pleasantly surprised by Horatio Johnbull's warm welcome, Jal Feroz remained silent for a few minutes. The man who had been introduced to him as Mr. Albert Harris, junior partner of Messrs. Harris and Harvey Ltd., of Liverpool, broke the silence. He unburdened himself to the young man to the effect that he was the largest buyer of "muck and truck" in the whole of India. "What on earth is this 'muck and truck' of yours?" enquired Jal Feroz innocently. Mr. Harris was rather amused at his ignorance, but he supplied the necessary information, explaining that "muck and truck" included all classes of waste products, such as oily cotton waste, greasy wool waste, fluffy silk waste, animal and human hair, bristles, dried blood, waste paper, and rags. Seeing Jal's interest in his account of this unusual trade, with an air of secrecy he confided that more millions were made from waste than from economy.

Horatio Johnbull, to break the ice, enquired why he had not seen Jal in the meeting at the Empire Hall. "You don't seem to take much interest in the political activities of your father," he remarked.

By this time, Jal Feroz had recovered his composure. He replied: "We don't share common views in politics. In fact, we are poles apart. I don't believe in creating scenes in the house. And for that reason, I keep away from my father's political meetings."

Horatio Johnbull appreciated the frank manner in which Jal Feroz expressed himself. He was impressed with the young man's genial and modest disposition. "I should like to know your views on the present political developments in India," he said in a low voice.

"I don't know whether my views, or those of my friends in the Western India Socialists' Association would suit your political creed," answered Jal Feroz hesitantly. "But if you can spare the time, we shall be glad to give you some idea of our programme." Pointing

to the table where his companions were still enjoying a round of drinks, he added: "Our leader, Mr. Azadali, and our General Secretary, Miss Indumati Khisku, have come down from Delhi for an urgent meeting. They are both here along with other comrades. If you have no objection, I shall bring them along with me some time tomorrow afternoon."

"I shall be delighted to meet you all in my rooms tomorrow at four," said Horatio Johnbull, with an affectionate smile. "Do have tea with me, and don't forget to bring your lady friend with you. We shall have a social chat on socialism."

The band was still pouring forth jazzy and jerky melodies; but the visitors were already leaving the smoking lounge, and the dancing floor was beginning to empty. The dinner hour was fast approaching, and everybody who was anybody in the social life of Bombay, was thinking of hurrying home to change for dinner, and to prepare for midnight revelry.

CHAPTER VI  
MR. JOHNBULL MEETS SOME  
SOCIALISTS

The seasonal residents of the Mumtaz Mahal Hotel were just recovering from the after-effects of an enormously heavy lunch, when three young men in Indian costume, and a beautifully dressed young lady in a low blouse and a white crêpe sari, entered the lift and asked the attendant to conduct them to Suite No. 99 on the second floor. There was no bustle in the passages of the second floor. Goanese waiters carrying tea-trays were depositing their loads in different rooms. There was a sort of slumberous atmosphere in the long corridors leading to different suites, and even the servants of the residents were lying lazily on the floor space outside the rooms of their masters.

Jal Feroz led his two friends and Miss Indumati Khisku to suite No. 99, occupied by Horatio Johnbull, and after a knock at the door, walked into the drawing room. Horatio Johnbull was awaiting their arrival. He got up from his armchair, welcomed his guests suitably and requested them to form a circle around a large table on which sandwiches, meat patties, assorted pastries, and chocolates had been laid.

"I'm so glad to meet you, Miss Indumati," he said. "I hope you don't mind my calling you by your first name. It's so much prettier and easier to pronounce."

"Please don't stand on ceremonies, and do call me by my first name," answered Indumati, without any signs of embarrassment. "In our circle, we don't believe in wasting time and energy on prefixes and surnames. Birth names are always more natural and homely than highly exaggerated family names."

Although Horatio Johnbull had never met Azadali, the socialist leader, or his active colleague, Ramdev Varma, he had read their speeches and accounts of their movement in the Indian newspapers. He now realised for the first time that Azadali was a man of action, and not a dreamy political theorist who wanted to indulge in "class war" for the sake of personal ambition or intellectual conviction.

Azadali was a young man of thirty, who, prior to his entry into the socialist movement, had gone through an intensive course in sociology at the London University. Born in a land-owning orthodox Muslim family, and brought up in the Islamic faith, he had, at an early age, understood the true meaning of the brotherhood of man, but unlike some of his co-religionists had discarded the yoke of rigid communalism fostered by some self-seeking Indian leaders during the later stages of the Non-co-operation Movement. He had studied the various schools of thought in socialism, from Plato through Robert Owen and Fourier, to Karl Marx and Lenin. He had, however, discovered by personal experience that the economic, social, religious, and political conditions in India demanded a solution radically different from that applied in Russia.

Although Azadali believed in the orderly evolution of society, he was, at the same time, anxious to hasten the processes of evolution by direct action and organising on the right lines. He reconciled this contradiction by claiming that the democracy introduced into India by British statesmen was not only utterly unsuitable, but also hopelessly slow in bringing about social betterment. He deplored and pitied the helplessness of the poverty-stricken masses, and declared openly that, without an immediate social revolution, the conditions of the working classes could not be improved. His war cry was: "Abolish poverty and its attendant humiliating mentality."

The guests had finished their tea, and were feeling perfectly at home in Horatio Johnbull's elaborately

furnished sitting-room. The host was also in a lively and cheerful mood. He avoided the subject of politics for some time. At last, he made up his mind to start the promised discussion. "Do you think," he asked Azadali, "that it's possible to abolish poverty in India by applying the doctrines of the Communist Manifesto?"

"I am afraid I can't answer this question," replied Azadali, "without referring to the unusual conditions of our country. If you are prepared to listen to a long preface, I shall try to explain the particular problems with which we are faced, and which prevent us from applying wholesale the methods of socialism followed in England, and in some of the Continental countries."

"Please go ahead," said his host.

"The foremost problem," continued Azadali, "which may also be regarded as an insurmountable obstacle to the progress of socialism, is the existence in India of large populations and areas under the jurisdiction of Indian Princes, whose internal sovereignty, ruthless feudalism, and autocracy, are not only protected, but actually encouraged and admired by the Paramount Power. Now-a-days, it is fashionable to refer to Indian States as "Indian India," a description which makes a medieval picture look more ridiculous than ever.

"The next problem, which is an offshoot of the first, is the large body of landowning classes whose rights and privileges are protected by law, and in certain cases, perpetuated by the East India Company. These classes draw unduly large incomes, lead luxurious lives in cosmopolitan towns, and often become members of the Reformed Government at the expense of the peasantry. They are born enemies of socialism, and no amount of argument will ever convince them of the legitimate social rights of their tenants.

"And the most baffling problem of all," continued Azadali sombrely, "is the replacement of the native system of production by a highly complicated and selfishly organised system of industrialism imported



from the west. Mass production is indeed inevitable, and to a certain extent desirable, but the 'surplus value' which it represents, should not be allowed to concentrate in the hands of a few grabbing capitalists. What is actually happening in India is that the millionaire is getting richer, and the worker poorer through the rapid expansion of mechanised industries. The fear of gnawing hunger and perpetual poverty compels the worker to accept absurdly low wages. He dare not indulge in socialism, for, if he did, there would be no work for him the next morning."

Horatio Johnbull was listening attentively to Azadali's line of argument. He was wondering why the socialist regarded modern industrialism as an impediment in the path of socialism. Without committing himself to a definite view-point, he enquired: "Are you dissatisfied with the progress that India has made in industrial self-sufficiency since the beginning of this century, and with the measures of protection granted to iron, cotton, and sugar industries?"

Azadali changed his sombre mood and smiled. "I'm not grumbling about self-sufficiency," he said, "but I'm certainly unhappy about the conditions of the working classes. After having allowed, and even encouraged the lucky speculator to accumulate wealth, the law helps him to get wealthier in industry by granting him protection against outside competition. Generally speaking, the middle-class taxpayer and the poor working man bear the cost of tariffs and subsidies. If the benefits were re-distributed in the shape of higher wages and greater leisure for recreation, no sane person would object to them. The sugar-cane growers, the mine workers, the cotton spinners, and the blast-furnace men are worse off than before; whereas a new race of sugar and steel magnates is cropping up every third year."

"Apart from industry, how would you get over the barriers created by social prejudices and religious distinctions?" enquired Horatio Johnbull.

"It is becoming increasingly difficult," answered Azadali frankly. "Over-emphasis of religion in purely economic matters leads to the formation of sectarian political bodies, which in their turn, continue to wage war against each other. Socialism, as you know, deals with the economic relationships of individuals and society. It has nothing to do with the religious nature of man. So long as religion predominates and sectarianism flourishes, there is no chance for socialism."

Turning towards Indumati Khisku, Horatio Johnbull asked: "Don't you think religion will always be a dominant factor in the political life of your country?"

Indumati had no faith in the sectarian gods, nor use for the rituals prescribed by Popes and Pandits. "I don't think so," she replied with a firm voice. "We are already moving away from the path of orthodoxy. When the old generation of religious faddists passes, and a truly rational government acquires power, religion will cease to disturb our economic life. The trouble is that even educated people are made to think that orthodoxy in religion is necessary to economic stability."

Azadali resumed his argument. "I must explain" he said, "that our movement has not been able to achieve much success owing to the fact that trade-unionism is still in its infancy in this country. The workers are not yet conscious of their own strength, nor are they sufficiently organised to form a powerful political body. The official recognition of trade unions is comparatively recent."

"I would advise you not to be too optimistic," said Horatio Johnbull in a friendly way. "In my opinion, the possessing classes in this country will succeed in shaping trade unionism to suit their own ends. They did the same thing in England, and prevented the Labour Government from carrying out any programme of socialism. I should imagine that the well-to-do intellectuals who started the labour movement in India would either align themselves with capitalism and

knock socialism on the head, or retire from it through sheer disgust."

"I'm sorry to learn," said Azadali, "that you hold a pessimistic view of our alliance with the labour movement."

"I'm not pessimistic," answered Horatio Johnbull sympathetically, "but I'm unable to see any future for socialism in the light of your arguments. Moreover, it seems that there's not much sympathy for your movement even amongst the staunch nationalists."

Azadali was inwardly annoyed with this last observation. Preserving his outward calm he answered: "I don't agree with you when you talk of lack of sympathy on the part of staunch nationalists. They have their own reasons for not making a show of their socialism but, at heart, they feel the same way as we do."

"What is your programme, if I may be allowed to ask this question?" enquired Horatio Johnbull.

"Our programme," said Azadali somewhat diffidently, "is not static. To be of any practical value, it must change with the changing needs of society. We are affiliated to the All-India National Association, and though we preserve our political entity, in all matters of 'direct action,' we follow the policy of the parent body. At present we are simply watching the growth of Provincial Autonomy, which, we believe will be an utter failure. If and when, and there is a big IF, and a bigger WHEN before us, we come into power, we shall launch upon a programme of a really constructive nature. Briefly, we are aiming at the realisation of our seven points:—

(1) Free compulsory education and sanitation for all; (2) Lands for the landless and homes for the homeless; (3) Nationalisation of the transport system, and public utility concerns; (4) Nationalisation of the key industries, also the liquidation of the textile industry, and its re-organisation; (5) Introduction of death duties, 'adoption tax,' and excess profits taxes. (6) Organisation of shipping services both mercantile and

naval, and the compulsory training of Indians in coastal defence; and (7) Economic equality of all 'Indian citizens,' irrespective of caste, colour, or creed."

By this time, the discussion had become rather technical and boring. In his charming manner, Horatio Johnbull apologised for having dragged the conversation into these channels. He changed the topic, and told them some stories of his escapades in Southern Europe, where he had spent a couple of months during the stirring times of 1933. Indumati and her friends joined the chorus of laughter, and even Jal Feroz, who had deliberately remained silent throughout the discussion, began to talk about his experiences in Asia Minor. Indumati was all smiles. She had thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.

Horatio Johnbull told them that he had received urgent invitations from Delhi, and would, in all probability, leave Bombay on the following day, provided the Mayor held his enthusiasm in check, and did not insist upon his visiting the Birth Control Clinic. He thanked them all for a very interesting evening and hoped that he would meet them again, either in Delhi, or in Bombay on his return from his tour of India.

Horatio Johnbull finished all his engagements on Wednesday, the 25th of November, and left for Delhi by the Frontier Mail at 9-30 P. M. with an English-speaking Indian servant whom he had engaged soon after his arrival in India.

## CHAPTER VII

### WELCOME TO DELHI

At long last, after a journey of nearly twenty-three hours, through long stretches of sandy tracts and barren hills of Central India, the Frontier Mail steamed breathlessly into the multi-arched platform of Delhi railway station, with its many passengers. Pathans had travelled all the way from Bombay, where they had been carrying on money-lending business at exorbitant rates of interest, and were now rich enough to show their gaudy waistcoats and embroidered shirts to their humbler relations in Peshawar. Marwaries had joined the Mail train at Ratlam, and were now in Delhi to replenish their stocks of such commodities of retail trade as spices, dried-fruits, and sugar. Punjabi contractors who had made small fortunes in the construction of roads, bridges, culverts, and viaducts, in distant parts of India had joined the train at different railway stations. A large crowd of Anglo-Indian railway employees, who, by virtue of working for the company, had secured free second-class tickets, were now visiting the Imperial City to refresh their geography, and to view again the ancestral glory of the city of their forefathers.

The railway platform was, as usual, the central stage of many scenes typical of Indian life. There was a long row of uniformed porters, who, in accordance with a recent resolution of the R.P.U. (Railway Porters' Union), had changed the colour of their short jackets from a dirty blue to scarlet red, and that of their turbans, from a dull pink to bright yellow. They stood on the platform in a dignified and orderly manner, ready to handle packages from a small hat box to a large cabin

trunk. Stall keepers looked about restlessly, inviting the attention of the out-going passengers to the quality and freshness of foodstuffs and fruits, which they had carefully placed on moving trolleys. The liveried attendants of Hindu, Muslim, and European refreshment-rooms were hastening towards the train to seek hungry or thirsty customers. Small boys were shouting at the top of their voices, selling newspapers, cigarettes and matches. Licensed hawkers were busy finding buyers of shoes, slippers, leather straps, walking sticks, and knobkerries. Keepers of tea stalls were doing a roaring business in Lipton's Special cups, home-made buns, and brilliantly coloured cakes. Hotel guides were rushing about, soliciting patronage for big and small, eastern and western, hotels and boarding houses. Men in uniform from the waiting and retiring rooms were offering peace and rest to weary passengers, and pocketing tips from those who had already refreshed themselves.

The platform was, in short, a miniature city where one could purchase almost anything in the travelling line. There was a mad jumble of noises, and a babel of human voices. One could hear Pushto, Hindustani, Gujarati, English, Punjabi and refined Urdu of Delhi. To a foreigner unaccustomed to the disharmonious mixture of Indian languages, the scene must have presented a veritable pandemonium.

In the middle of the platform, under one of the main arches, and not very far from the staircase leading to the over-bridge, stood a group of men and a young lady, awaiting solemnly and seriously the arrival of Horatio Johnbull Esq., M.P. The most important man in the group was a tall Englishman, a little over six feet in height, dressed in the conventional evening dress, with a silk scarf around his neck and a heavy overcoat on his body. He appeared to be a man of great determination and authority. While he sauntered up and down with the young lady accompanying him, he gave frequent upward twists to his grey moustache. Occasionally he chatted with the young lady and pro-

duced a ripple of laughter. He was well-built and of athletic appearance. His face could not be seen clearly under the soft felt hat which he had pushed down to guard against the cold smoke-laden wind blowing mercilessly on this evening of Thursday, the 26th of November, 1936. Many of the bystanders recognised him even from a distance as the celebrated Police Chief, Sir David Diehard, who had known Johnbull senior for many years, and had also met Horatio during one of his 'home leave' trips to England. He had retired at the early age of fifty-five, but his services had been requisitioned by the Central Government for a further period of three years, to organise a new department at the central headquarters for keeping the future Federal Government fully informed of political crimes and plots of a dangerous nature. This was his first season in Delhi as a highly important Government official, and he was looking forward to further honours and distinctions in his profession. He was more than pleased when he received Horatio Johnbull's telegram about his arrival in Delhi, and had come to the railway station to give his old friend's distinguished son a hearty welcome.

Walking by his side, and chatting gaily, was his only daughter, Cynthia, who, since the death of her mother in 1932, had left the University of London and returned to India to look after her father. Unlike the mid-Victorian maiden, she was quickwitted, charmingly frank, and sporting in nature. Tall and slim, with a graceful figure and fascinating features, she was kindly and amiable in disposition. For four years, she had kept her father's household in the capital of the United Provinces under firm control and discipline.

Cynthia had been at a boarding school for girls, had later lived a somewhat Bohemian life in the West-end of London, had visited the Jewish and Chinese quarters in the East-end, and had even paid several flying visits to the Latin Quarter in Paris. She had passed through all these phases of life with no damage to her moral reputation. She condemned pru-

dery and regarded sex as a sort of physical appetite which could be controlled or indulged in excess, like any other appetite. She was dashing, energetic and full of "*Joie de Vivre*." Her father's admiration for Horatio Johnbull had aroused her curiosity and she had insisted upon coming to the railway station to meet the friend of the family.

Another important figure standing clumsily and timidly on the platform (as if the platform were the outer sanctum of a sacred temple) was a short-statured man with drooping moustache on a tiny emaciated face. His large white turban was worn in such a manner that only a small portion of his face could be seen. He was thickly padded and heavily clad, and on the top of all his clothing he had an imitation Kashmir shawl.

This individual had the fortunate habit of divining the arrival of eminent, influential, and distinguished English visitors, and these divinations generally took place in the private seances he held, at least once a week, with an important police official who was then working in the Department for the Protection of Prominent Personages. This important figure was, in fact, Lala Munna Lal, the celebrated canteen contractor, who had in his care the physical welfare of several British regiments stationed in Meerut and other cantonments. Since the abolition of the Army Canteen Board, the celebrated Lalaji had donated several trophies to the Army Polo Team, and had acquired a measurably vast fortune by supplying diluted beer, and rotten tinned foodstuffs to the troops. He did not know the English language, but he knew the gentle art of securing canteen contracts long before the British regiments left for their Eastern destinations. He had no use for politicians, but he must offer a cordial welcome to a famous member of the British Parliament, who might some day introduce the name of his celebrated firm, known throughout Northern India military circles, as Munna Lal and Sons, to some commanding officer, at



home. He had no sons of his own, and had adopted a nephew; but he hoped that by using the suffix "and Sons", the Lord of Procreation would bless him with a son and heir, who, in course of time, would carry on the noble traditions of the family. He was an orthodox Hindu, a vegetarian, and a teetotaler; but so long as liquor and meat yielded money, he had no objection to pouring fresh capital into the canteen business.

Behind him stood his secretary and head clerk, Babu Chakravati, popularly known as *Chukra Babu*, a young Bengali with a fairly decent accent in English, and a smart appearance. He acted as the mouthpiece of his worthy master, the canteen magnate, and translated Urdu into English, with personal notes and comments, for the benefit of Munna Lal's European guests. He carried a small basket of flowers and a neat garland of white and pink roses, and was ready to pounce upon the neck of the distinguished visitor as and when opportunity arose.

A few paces ahead and almost in line with Lala Munna Lal stood the famous manufacturer of tents and camp equipment to the civil and military authorities. He was known as Khan Sahib Ata-ullah Khan, a man of about fifty, of medium height, and an impressive appearance. He had a neatly trimmed and lightly tinted beard, and a short pointed moustache. He stood erect in a dignified manner with his frontier turban and embroidered skull cap. In addition to his business activity, he was noted for his expert knowledge of shikar and hunting. He had assisted many a well-known Sahib in bagging tigers and leopards, and could make elaborate arrangements for shikar at a moment's notice. He had learnt of the arrival of Johnbull Sahib from a distant cousin who was a sub-inspector of police, and had come to the railway station to offer his salaams, and services if required. He was a man of few words, and knew only those terms and expressions in the English language, which were commonly used by the tourists.

And lastly, there was on the platform, Dinshaw Edulji, the accredited representative of Sir Cursetji Todibacha in the Imperial Capital. He was a youngish-looking man of about thirty-five, and wore the traditional head dress of his community, and the customary long coat and baggy trousers. Since it was a very cold night in Delhi, he had wrapped around his neck a huge warm woollen muffler of dark green colour, lovingly and laboriously knitted for his exclusive use by his devoted wife. He had received a telegram from his "Big Boss," asking him to attend at the railway station, and to render such assistance as Horatio Johnbull might require on his arrival, and during his stay in the Imperial City.

As the Frontier Mail steamed into the railway station, and as soon as the grinding of the wheels of the giant locomotive had stopped, Sir David Diehard at once recognised the face of his old friend's son and hastened towards the door of the first-class compartment in which Horatio Johnbull had come to the end of a tiresome and fatiguing journey.

"I'm tremendously glad to see you after all these years," he said as he greeted the visitor on the platform. "You haven't met Cynthia," he added affectionately.

Cynthia Diehard, whom Horatio Johnbull met for the first time, was in the fulness of her womanhood, and in the richness of her experience of twenty-five years of life. There was something genuinely superior in her face which appealed to his experienced eyes. It was not a question of love at first sight. It was something totally different, something akin to a deep understanding of the person whom he had not met before, but of whom he had heard a great deal. "I hope I shan't be a burden to you", he said smilingly, "I've been looking forward to my visit to Delhi, and am glad to have the opportunity of spending a fortnight in such charming company."

The small reception committee of Horatio Johnbull's would-be admirers now came forward, and

encouraged by the gentle gesture of the Police Chief, presented him with flowers, garlands and profuse salutations. He was naturally surprised at the presence on the platform to welcome him, of men whom he had never seen or heard of in his life. He felt a little embarrassed at first and refused to accept the floral gifts. Sir David Diehard who was an expert in the psychology of "loyal Indian gentlemen," however, explained that these people belonged to commerce, and being in direct touch with various Government departments were aware of the arrival of distinguished British visitors. He informed Horatio Johnbull that their loyalty to the British Raj entitled them to pay homage to a member of the Home Parliament. Partly satisfied with this introduction, he accepted the garlands and shook hands with the members of the party. He assured Dinshaw Edulji that if he required his services, he would certainly get in touch with him. The others were pleased to learn that he would be Sir David's guest at No. 13 Roshanara Road, New Delhi, during his stay in the Imperial City.

After having directed the servants to collect the luggage, and take it in a tonga to New Delhi, Sir David conducted his daughter and guest to the saloon car which was waiting in the central porch of the railway station. In a fatherly manner Sir David sat in the middle, his daughter on his left, and his guest on his right. They drove away to the new Imperial City in the darkness of a cold starry night.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AN EVENING AT HOME

New Delhi was gorgeously cold towards the end of November. Winter had already commenced its march in the real northern style. The trees in the avenues leading to the central thoroughfares were shedding their leaves in autumnal humility. The clear blue sky and the uninterrupted sunshine during the day enabled the residents and visitors of the Imperial City to move about in ease and comfort.

Everything about the Imperial City was truly and eminently imperial. The tarred roads and open spaces, the long lines of residential quarters and officers' bungalows, the mystifying circles built in the middle of watered avenues, and the imposing structures of the Imperial Secretariat and Legislative Chambers were all imperial, both in political importance and in style. The famous architect who received universal praise for planning the Imperial City and for designing the massive red-stone buildings, must have had in his mind the establishment of a super Indo-British Empire far exceeding the glory and splendour of the Roman Empire. His technical instructions, however, seem to have been miscarried. The executive staff forgot to adapt the lay-out of the city to the natural requirements of the locality, and left the creation of architectural harmony in the hands of unimaginative contractors. No one can tell, not even a scholar in the history of architecture, as to how this puzzling and amazingly un-Indian scheme was evolved. In their zeal to surpass Rome and Athens of ancient glory, the builders produced a series of uncomfortably white

bungalows, and a dotted line of massive, pillared, and towered structures of red stone. However, that is past history; though it landed India in a total expenditure of over twenty crores of good public money.

The Imperial Government had already been in residence for over a month. Liveried attendants and red-coated peons were hastening the process of imperial routine by carrying bundles and bundles of official files and documents from one department to another in the Imperial Secretariat. Even humble clerks drawing meagre salaries had an imperial air about them. They regarded themselves as distinctly superior to and more impressive than their co-workers in the provincial sphere. They were sanctified by the hallmark of imperialism, and were entitled to spend the summer months in Simla with their imperial officers. They were not humble citizens of a poor down-trodden country. They were custodians of imperial secrets, and on their notes and comments depended the safety of the army, the police, and above all the budget of the Indian Empire. Anyone could see them marching breathlessly in their provincial costumes and regional headgear, from their imperial quarters to their imperial desks in the secretariat at an early hour of a cold winter morning.

The unofficial imperialism of the Imperial City was represented by a particular class of the *Nouveau Riche*, a class, the origin of which it was difficult, indeed impossible, to trace. It was believed that the members of this class, at some point in their past history, had served in various subordinate capacities in the Public Works Departments of different provinces. Another theory (inspired by the members themselves) was that they had started life as small building contractors, plumbers, stone dealers, quarry owners, and house decorators. Whatever their origin, they were now pillars of society in the Imperial City. They had obviously dug untold wealth out of the very foundations of the imperial structures, and found gold in the marble, timber, cement, and limestone supplied to the imperial

engineers. They were now living in luxury in palatial buildings of their own. Those of them who had the advantage of secondary education, were important figures in the Imperial Municipality, and other public institutions. They were a new class of *Bourgeoisie* who could be distinguished from other imperial residents by their greater earthly possessions.

The most ardently imperial of all the imperialists of Delhi were the fabulously rich princes of India, who had built princely palaces for their brief wintery sojourn in the Imperial City. The building contractors of the *nouveau riche* class were immensely grateful to them for their patronage and generosity. The "contracting fraternity" had subtle ways of its own. They had had no difficulty in inducing their princely patrons to acquire only those sites which had been previously reserved by themselves. Architects of the Italian and German schools were invited to add touches of modernity to the general scheme of planning and designing and although the original architectural disharmony was not disturbed to any appreciable extent, there was an atmosphere of stimulating freshness around the princely palaces. Money was spent lavishly and heartlessly in providing banqueting-halls and guest-houses for the entertainment of princely guests, and imperial visitors.

There were two distinct categories of the local population, the respective members of which neither felt nor behaved imperially. These were the shopkeepers, and the daily wage-earning labourers whom chance and destiny had placed in the midst of an imperial environment. The former included milliners, dress-makers, certified tailors, hair-dressers, dyers and bleachers, chemists and druggists, furnishers and decorators, dealers in curios, fabricated antiques and carpets, provision merchants, wine-sellers and sundry traders. These unimperial dwellers of the Imperial City depended chiefly on seasonal business, which lasted for about five months in a year. With few exceptions, they were unable to make profits on their seasonal sales;

but they always lived in the hope of a brighter future, and carried on their retail trades vigorously, though not with true imperial zeal.

The daily labourers were perhaps the least prosperous of all. As daily wage-earners, they were employed by the municipality, by the "contracting fraternity," and by others on daily jobs and on varying rates of wages which did not ensure the continuity of life beyond the second working day. Theirs was a chance existence, and they lived in tiny flimsy huts somewhere outside the Imperial City, where their wretched quarters could not disfigure the City, nor impair the imperial dignity. Their poverty was appalling. They could keep themselves warm only by continuously moving their limbs in menial occupations. They wore meagre wrappings of discarded and utterly worn-out clothing, and their meals were as uncertain as their daily jobs. If, and when they were regularly employed, they kept the tarred roads and open spaces spotlessly clean. Physically they looked utterly unimperial and mentally they felt nothing, for, whatever was left in them was concentrated on the difficult task of keeping alive. They worked as sweepers, scavengers, road menders, stone crushers, latrine washers, dust and dung collectors, and as odd coolies, and came to the Imperial City every morning in the hope of earning a few annas. Their numbers were not small, and without them, the sanitary conditions of the town and its environs could not be kept in good working order. They were indispensable, and yet a drug on the labour market.

In the heart of the Imperial City within walking distance of the Central Secretariat, and in an open corner of the main road, known as Roshanara Road, stood a fairly large bungalow, with an artistically laid-out garden and a low boundary wall. The front porch of the bungalow indicated that, the official who occupied it, held an important imperial post in the headquarters of the Central Government.

There was nothing extraordinary about the exter-

nal appearance of the house in question. It looked like any other white-washed and streamlined house on Roshanara Road, though somewhat larger and more dignified. Its internal scheme of decoration was however distinctive. Bed rooms and office-rooms, drawing and dining-rooms, had all been furnished and curtained in a delicate modern style. There were signs of artistic sobriety everywhere, indicating the finishing touches of a young woman who had studied life in the studios of Europe. Dignity was combined with comfort, and beauty with utility, to make the interior of the house really fascinating. Cynthia had taken particular care with her father's drawing room. The dull, drab, and creamy colour of the walls had been made cheerful by the simple addition of a few coloured prints and etchings she had purchased in London and Paris. Ugly and empty corners had been converted into miniature flower beds by placing flower pots of varying sizes on sliding nests of tables. Only a single portrait in a silver frame adorned a writing-table placed near a large bay window facing the northern end of the garden. A comfortable modern sofa and couple of easy chairs were placed in front of the fire-place. A small book case with three shelves of novels and reference books completed the room which had all the male requirements of a quiet evening at home.

Horatio Johnbull's arrival on the previous evening broke the spell of official monotony. Sir David Diehard and Cynthia both felt the more "homely" in having as guest a real friend from the old country. It was something quite different from having official colleagues to dinner once a week, and from going through the usual formalities of life in the Imperial City week after week. Horatio Johnbull brought to them freshness, vigour and friendly feelings straight from home, and they felt the warmth of these feelings.

The dinner was over. It was informal, and yet sartorially formal. Sir David Diehard was fully conscious that the average Englishman did not dress for



dinner in formal clothes when dining at home. But having spent over thirty years of his life in India in establishing law and order, and in impressing the dignity and might of his race upon the poor people, he had, like many thousands of his countrymen, realised the value of evening dress as a means to the achievement of an imperial end. At times, this realisation made him go through physical torture, especially in summer-time in Lucknow and Allahabad, when the gods of weather were as unkind to the ruling race as to the people of the Province. As he was particularly keen on maintaining the prestige of the Sahibs in the eyes of the people who had never crossed the high seas, he always dressed for dinner. Horatio Johnbull was, however, unaware of the imperial value of evening clothes and double-boiled shirts. He dressed for dinner simply to conform to the prevailing practice in India.

Cynthia was dressed in a beautiful pale-blue evening gown. Her slightly waved and bobbed hair added a ravishing charm to the outline of her graceful figure. There was just a touch of youthful abandon in her manner, and a tinge of unconventional freedom in her conversation.

After dinner, they moved to the drawing room and settled themselves comfortably in front of the fire-place. Sir David was waiting his opportunity to refer to the political meeting in Bombay. "I was glad to see," he said in a fatherly manner, "that you observed reticence in that meeting at the Empire Hall. Whatever their views, these politicians are not worth bothering about."

Horatio Johnbull was more interested in Cynthia than in Sir David's political comments. In a somewhat casual manner, he answered: "I wasn't prepared for a discussion on imperial problems. It would have been unfair, and perhaps dangerous to express one-sided opinions."

"My dear boy," thundered Sir David, "you're completely ignorant of the tactics of Indian politicians and agitators. They hang on to anything that an M. P.

might utter in good faith. They accept the speech of a visiting Labour Member as a message from the British people. I've lived in India long enough to realise that more harm is done to the prestige of those on the spot by irresponsible labourites than by all the mouthings of the agitators. The Montford Reforms of 1919 gave them liberty of speech in the Central and Provincial Legislatures, and what was the result? They insulted us and made us dance around their Ministers. We're here to protect the dumb millions of India, and to preserve law and order. We've done our best and we demand gratitude in return. What we actually get is nothing but abuse and insolence from the native politicians."

"With all due respect to your experience and knowledge of the local conditions," said Horatio Johnbull slowly and without any sign of excitement, "I'm afraid I can neither disagree nor agree with your views on the reformed system of administration. All that I can say at the present moment is that, British policy in regard to India must necessarily change with the changed political conditions of the world. We can't pursue a policy of domination when the people are becoming increasingly conscious of their national strength."

Sir David Diehard could not possibly swallow this advanced view with equanimity. Patience was certainly not one of his virtues. He blurted out: "And who is responsible for this national awakening, may I ask? The answer is: 'the British Parliament.' By dinning into the ears of lawyers and politicians the value of democracy, we've imposed upon the masses a system which is foreign to their very nature with the result that they have become tools in the hands of the agitators who are always out to gain power for their own ends. No sir, you cannot understand the mentality of these people unless you have lived amongst them and maintained law and order in times of political and racial disturbance."

"Do you mean to tell me, Sir David," enquired Horatio Johnbull "that educated and cultured Indians

are neither efficient in their duties, nor honest in their convictions ? ”

Cynthia was getting impatient and annoyed with this futile discussion. “ Mr. Johnbull,” she intervened, “ I do wish Daddy would give up this horrid attitude. He simply can't get accustomed to the changed conditions. The very name of self-government is unpleasant to him. He's carrying on his duties grumblingly.”

“ Cynthia, my darling,” said Sir David, “ you shouldn't be hard on your old Daddy. I can quite understand that a political discussion of this nature is utterly boring. But I must do my duty and save Horatio from the poison of our opponents.”

Turning towards Horatio Johnbull, Sir David continued : “ Yes, there are Indians who are capable and loyal, and fortunately, they do not belong to the ranks of the agitators. They are men with a backbone, who have risen to great heights through loyalty, courage and determination, and have stood by us in difficult times. They believe in British justice and do not fall for the tripe of professional politicians. They may not be highly educated like some of these platform speakers, but they are practical administrators. If you are at all keen on meeting one of them, I shall introduce you to my esteemed friend. Rai Bahadur Pandit Damodar Nath Khisku, who is now acting as the Imperial Superintendent of Agriculture, and is directly responsible for the welfare of millions of cultivators in this country. I've known him for years and I can assure you that he deserves the position he has attained through loyalty and hard work. He will show you round the various demonstration farms he has recently organised for the benefit of the poor peasant.”

“ I should like to meet him tomorrow, if it's possible to arrange an interview at such a short notice,” observed Horatio Johnbull.

“ I shall telephone early in the morning and find out if he can have a chat with you some time before lunch tomorrow,” answered Sir David.

Cynthia's intervention had already quietened her father down. Conversation was diverted to the usual social gossip about new cinemas, theatres, and plays in London. Horatio Johnbull gave them the latest news from home. Even Sir David indulged in what he described as "police humour," and told several amusing stories of his former days. Cynthia added some anecdotes of social life in the hills and plains of the United Provinces, where she had spent the greater part of the past three years.

On retiring Cynthia could not sleep for some time. She was still thinking of the sweet remarks made by Horatio Johnbull early in the evening about her coiffure and charmingly simple evening gown. The woman in her discovered a new sense of satisfaction in the presence of this unassuming strong man. She felt in her subconscious mind the ebb and flow of emotion. After an hour's restless thinking she went off to sleep.

## CHAPTER IX

### A CONTACT WITH BUREAUCRACY

The Imperial Department of Agriculture had its home in one of the many wings of the Imperial Secretariat. It occupied a vast space on the second floor of a particularly huge structure. It was accessible to visitors and legislators by means of an express lift. Among members of the staff, and also among those who had dealings with it, the Department was known as the "Ida." It was the pride of the Imperial Legislature and a pet of the Central Government. It had manifold branches and manifold functions. Distinguished imperial citizens from all over India, cautiously picked and carefully chosen, sat on its various constructive and ornamental committees. It was a wonder of wonders, and the most wonderful thing about it was that it had as its Chief Executive Officer, the well-known administrator, Rai Bahadur, Pandit Damodar Nath Khisku, M. B. E.

The Rai Bahadur was the acme of politeness and bureaucratic tact. He was still under fifty, but being shrewd and eminently loyal, he had climbed to his present height in a comparatively short time. Having successfully failed to cross the barrier of Matriculation in 1907, he had taken to stenography and type-writing as a means of eking out a living for himself and his beautiful wife, who was a child of fourteen at the time. Through sheer hard work, optimism, and a carefully displayed loyalty to his superior officers, he had managed by 1918, to secure the coveted position of Personal Assistant to a Deputy Commissioner. In full recognition of his services, which involved frequent

sacrifice of self-respect, national honour, and pride of birth, he was awarded three letters M. B. E., and subsequently promoted to the Provincial Civil Service in the year 1920, when political disturbances had been promptly, though violently, suppressed by the benign and merciful Government for the ultimate and collective good of the people.

The Rai Bahadur had, on several occasions, declared privately to his intimate friends that, but for the timely action taken by him in those troublesome times, the Indian Empire would have been shattered to pieces by the unruly mob—so proud was he of his unceasing loyalty and devotion to duty.

He had great faith in the fair play and justice of the District Officers, who, assisted by their loyal and judicious Indian subordinates, could carry on the administration of India for centuries to come. He could not understand why highly-educated and intelligent Indians of noble families were playing the futile game of political independence. The British had given them schools, colleges, technical institutions, railways, telegraphs, telephones, radios, and even aeroplanes, and above all, a peaceful and prosperous rule. "Why should these fanatics clamour for the moon?" he often said to his admirers.

He had been duly recognised as a Member of the British Empire. He had been awarded the title of Rai Bahadur, which distinguished him from the common folk, who were known only as Mr. So and So or as Pandit So and So. He was entitled to wear a gold-embroidered cloak of honour on all ceremonial occasions and official functions.

In his own mind he was convinced that he could remove, or at any rate alleviate, poverty and unemployment by directing the energies of young men to farm work. Despite his early failures as a scholar, he had acquired, through long and continued practice, mastery in the art of writing official notes; so much so that in his capacity as the Imperial Superintendent of Agri-

culture, he made quite a private mania of "note-writing" on the conditions of the peasantry, the supply of improved varieties of seeds to the poor cultivator, the destruction of locusts and other pests, the desirability of increasing the yields of seasonal crops, and so on. Whether he would ultimately achieve the same success in his new job as he had in the past was a matter of speculation. All that one could say was that he was a thoroughly efficient and methodical superintendent.

On the morning of the 27th of November, the Imperial Department of Agriculture and its Chief Executive Officer were uncommonly busy with the arrangement of official files and documents relating to the Department. The Rai Bahadur had already responded amiably to Sir David's request for a special interview for Horatio Johnbull. In matters of publicity and propaganda, the Imperial Superintendent was a live wire. He was therefore both flattered and glad when the British M. P. called on him at 11 a. m. In a slightly exaggerated accent, which he had acquired from his association with British District Officers, he greeted the eminent visitor.

"I am honoured," he said, "to have the opportunity of making your acquaintance, Mr. Johnbull. I have the highest regard for my friend Sir David Diehard, who has asked me to give you every facility to understand the working of my Imperial Department."

"Many thanks for your kind offer," answered Horatio Johnbull. "I shall consider it a great favour if you'll be good enough to do so."

The Rai Bahadur was beginning to feel imperially important. With a shrewd smile on his face, he said: "It is understood that during the course of our discussion, we shall not mix agriculture with politics." Horatio Johnbull's nod assured him that he was on safe ground.

In a slow, though dignified voice, reminiscent of his magisterial career, he commenced:

"In the first place, I must explain to you that our

organisation is a sort of clearing-house for all information relating to agricultural developments in the British Empire. We also form the link between the provincial departments of agriculture, and have at our disposal highly paid experts who specialise in agriculture and animal husbandry. We finance experimental works in different areas."

"The members of our cotton and sugar committees, who are landlords, merchants, and industrialists in their respective areas, have assisted us in working out schemes concerning the introduction of long-staple cotton and Java sugarcane."

Horatio Johnbull was listening patiently and attentively to the Imperial Superintendent's lecture. At this stage he asked an innocent question. "Are the peasants," he enquired, "or those responsible for actual farm operations allowed to nominate their representatives on these advisory committees, or is the membership restricted to merchants and politicians?"

"My dear Mr. Johnbull," almost shouted the great Rai Bahadur, "you seem to forget that our peasants are hopelessly ignorant and illiterate. How can they possibly represent their own interests at our meetings, or even behave in a manner worthy of our prestige?"

"Please forgive the interruption, and proceed with your statement," said Horatio Johnbull, in reply to the Rai Bahadur's outburst about the ignorance of the cultivator.

"Yes, I must emphasise," continued the Imperial Superintendent, "that these advisory committees have ably and loyally assisted us in our difficult problems. But for them we should never have been able to produce those special varieties of cotton which are best suited for export trade, nor could we have secured higher yields of sucrose from the imported varieties of sugarcane. Profits in these two industries are believed to be much higher than ever before."

"I wonder if the cultivator himself has made anything out of these improved varieties of cottons and



sugarcanes," muttered Horatio Johnbull.

The Rai Bahadur, however, went on: "So far I have given you a brief outline of the administrative aspects of our organisation. I must now give you a survey of our experimental activities.

"From the imperial standpoint, India is regarded as one vast continent including the Indian States. The subjects of the latter also benefit from their share in the activities of our Department. I am proud to say that we make no distinction between British India and Princely India. Our researches are spread over the whole continent. We have a network of agricultural colleges, laboratories, model farms, and cattle-breeding centres, from Landi Kotal in the north, to Cape Comorin in the South. We have magnificent college buildings and palatial hostels for our students. We have perfectly equipped workshops for the manufacture and repair of agricultural implements."

"I thought agriculture didn't require all that paraphernalia," remarked Horatio Johnbull casually.

"I am glad to inform you," continued the Rai Bahadur, without hesitation, "that in our laboratories, we test and analyse all kinds of soils, manures, water, and even air. In our model farms, we grow American cotton, Canadian wheat, South African maize, Dutch barley, and Scotch rye. In our experimental orchards, you will find the finest varieties of Italian grapes, Californian peaches, Cape oranges, Jaffa grape-fruit, and all the specimens of the citronella group. In Market gardening also, we have succeeded in producing bumper crops of cauliflowers, turnips, radishes, potatoes, and green peas of the finest possible types."

Once again Horatio Johnbull stirred in his chair, and made a slight movement towards the imperial speaker. "I'm unable to understand," he said, "how the peasant, being hopelessly poor and ignorant, will make any use of your elaborate demonstrations and laboratory processes? I'm sure you don't expect him to understand the results of your researches into soils

and manures."

The Rai Bahadur was nonplussed, but being of a bureaucratic bent of mind, answered: "This aspect of the problem concerns another department, which deals with what is now known as the 'Rural Uplift Programme.' The officers of that department are already engaged in the reconstruction of villages, and educational uplift of the rural population."

"I was given to understand," observed Horatio Johnbull, "that rural betterment meant the introduction of gramophones, films, and radios, as media of instruction. The central idea of this programme, as it appeared to me, was to bring the villager into closer contact with the life of the city."

"I am sorry I am unable to enlighten you on the programme of work of that beneficent department, as I am not directly concerned with its activities," replied our bureaucrat.

"Excuse my interruptions, Rai Bahadur," said Horatio Johnbull, "but I wish to be quite clear on one point. Have these scientific developments improved the earning capacity of the peasant, or raised his standard of living? I was told by a socialist the other day that the cultivator actually gets less for his produce today than he did ten years ago. I should have thought that this colossal expenditure of money would produce some visible improvements in the condition of the cultivators."

"Now, my dear sir," replied the Rai Bahadur, "you are asking me something. The price level, as you are fully aware, is governed by international conditions, and 'the standard of living' is an old theme of the socialist, which I am not in a position to deal with. I can, however, assure you that our energies are directed towards the ultimate good of the cultivator, and we are confident that, in years to come, he will gain much from our efforts."

"Don't you think," suggested Horatio Johnbull, "that your Department should establish direct con-

tact with the masses, rather than give expensive instruction to educated young men, who would only compete with each other in the labour market, and never go to the fields to impart their knowledge to those who need it most."

"This is indeed a valuable suggestion," acknowledged the Imperial Superintendent. "I shall certainly place it before the Central Advisory Committee, and I am sure they will appreciate the noble motive which has prompted it."

Drawing a sheet of paper from his stationery rack, the Imperial Superintendent jotted down a brief note to refresh his memory at the forthcoming meeting of the Central Advisory Committee, over whose deliberations he always presided.

Resuming his discourse, he said: "I now come to the latest aspect of our activity, which deals with animal husbandry. I suppose you are aware that the whole of India is crazy over the development of livestock. Our ideas for improving the breeding of bulls have been taken up not only by our District Officers but by titled gentry in all parts of India. Our state-owned cattle centres have presented pedigreed bulls to various municipalities and district boards. Our propaganda in this direction has gone so far that every intelligent man in India is now talking about the aristocracy of bulls. Our improved breeding methods will unquestionably lead to the improvement of cows and buffaloes, and we shall soon have rivers of good milk for our women and children."

Horatio Johnbull had read so much about this "bull-mania" that, for a minute or two, he felt as if he could scream with laughter. Then, recovering his self-possession he answered: "Yes, I agree with you that the quality of livestock is important, but I fail to see how you're going to provide millions of peasants with pedigreed bulls. Unless you make it a business proposition, and organise it on gigantic lines, you won't go very far in your objective. Donations, charities,

and free gifts have only spectacular effects which disappear with the initial enthusiasm."

The Rai Bahadur was anticipating this comment. He replied: "We shall organise Animal Co-operative Societies, and distribute pedigreed bulls through the primary village organisations on easy terms of payment."

The hour of noon had already passed, and the neighbouring departments were shutting down shop. Shuffling footsteps were heard in the long corridors and passages of the Imperial Secretariat. The Imperial Superintendent of Agriculture had already repeated the history and the glorious activities of his Department. He now offered to show Horatio Johnbull his local demonstration farms and research laboratories during the coming week. He also promised to send him a pamphlet dealing with the multifarious functions of his Department.

Horatio Johnbull thanked the Rai Bahadur for a very instructive discourse and promised to see him again in the very near future. On his return to No. 13 Roshanara Road he found Cynthia and her father awaiting his arrival for lunch. Sir David was so full of news about his new department that he forgot to enquire about the details of the discussion with Rai Bahadur.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ALMIGHTY RED-TAPE

Through the influence of his host, the famous police chief, Horatio Johnbull was able to establish many social and political contacts in the Imperial City within a short space of ten days. In his anxiety to collect the greatest possible information in the shortest possible time, he interviewed secretaries and honourable members of the Central Government. From day to day, he roamed among the magnificent offices of the Imperial Secretariat, and gathered as much information about the technique of administration as the guardians of law and order would permit. Although his parliamentary career in England was still in its infancy, he had acquired the art of sifting information from officials and their like. He soon discovered the invisible power behind imperial policy. It was not exactly a revelation to him; he knew that even countries with advanced democracies were in the grip of the Almighty Red-Tape.

After agriculture, which has always been regarded as a sort of hobby of imperialism, he tackled the gilded sanctuary known as the Department for the Protection and Preservation of Princely India, or in mathematical language D. 3P. I. Either through wire-pulling or through some charm of his own, Horatio Johnbull discovered that the secret archives, the million pigeon-holes, and the voluminous records, of this department dealt with the never-ending series of problems arising out of the interpretation and application of the Sanads, Treaties, and other political documents which the Paramount Power, at some stage or other, had signed

with the princes and potentates of India. The outstanding merit of D. 3P. I. was that it had bravely defied the onslaught of democracy. It had maintained its exclusiveness, and had marvellously preserved its secrets. Even its red-liveried and gold-spangled janitors had assumed an air of mystery.

The aged Colonel who greeted Horatio Johnbull with a charming smile and a warm hand-shake, made it abundantly clear in the very beginning of the interview that it was impossible for him to give the visitor even a glimpse of the inner secrets of his canopied summer house. The dealings of the Paramount Power with the princes, he said, were not subject to public or political discussion in the Legislative Chamber. He, however, assured Horatio Johnbull that the entire princely fraternity continued to offer unqualified, unflinching, and traditional loyalty; and for this reason, it was right and proper to protect them against agitators. The Government could not interfere in the internal administration of the politically-independent States, nor could they interest themselves in the conditions of the people. All that they could do was to insist upon "good government." Horatio Johnbull thought that this particular stipulation was indefinite, but the aged Colonel stressed the point further, and said that the Paramount Power had Agents and Residents in every nook and corner, whose main function was to report glaring cases of maladministration and unbearable oppression.

•He also referred to several other functions of his exclusive department. These included the settlement of inter-statal disputes, fixation of boundaries, award of subsidies in lieu of excise and railway revenues, the appointment of Regents during periods of minority, and the selection of suitable guardians and tutors to look after princelings.

Twisting his moustache and suppressing an involuntary smile, the Colonel bent over his table and said: "A subject which very often disturbs my peace is the determination of the legitimacy or otherwise of a

born or an unborn heir to a princely throne. I'm often pestered with claims from rival factions involving the intricacies of the ancient and much misunderstood Hindu Law. Intrigue becomes rampant and fortunes are spent by the parties concerned in despatching memorials and getting the legal points elucidated. Bumptious lawyers fill their pockets with gold and try their best to obscure the real issues, with the result that our Department is left in a wilderness of indecision for months and months."

"Do you allow the princes to govern their states in a despotic manner, or do you insist upon some sort of justice?" asked Horatio Johnbull in a halting tone

"Oh, no," answered the Colonel, "we pull them up occasionally. It wouldn't do to let them run amok and land themselves in financial troubles. Of course, we've nothing to do with the morbid eccentricities of those who indulge in reckless debauchery and sexual pastimes. It's their own funeral. But in matters affecting law and order, we have to see that their high-handed actions do not provoke revolt. We always put a stop to that sort of nonsense."

Horatio Johnbull was not altogether pleased with the meagre information given to him by the aged Colonel but he realised the delicate nature of the duties entrusted to this department.

He next drifted to other avenues in search of facts and figures having a bearing on the power of the Almighty Red-Tape.

He had often heard the cry of free and compulsory education for the masses. He felt that the success of the new democracy depended almost entirely upon the intelligent appreciation by the people of their rights as citizens of a self-governing country. He was anxious to know more about the activities of the departments dealing with education and public health. A few enquiries in the official circles made it clear that foreign experts were already investigating the problems connected with the reorganisation of the educational

system in India. In the educational field, as in the agricultural, colossal sums of money were being spent on higher and technological education, yet the primary educational needs of the people were being sadly neglected.

In matters of sanitation, the Imperial City was indeed a model for the whole of India. There were miniature Hyde Parks and Serpentine Lakes. There were water-works, drainage channels, tarred roads, central markets, and other amenities of civilised life. A small army of inspectors was detailed to keep down flies, mosquitoes, and other insect pests. Meat, fish, and milk were tested and stamped: "Safe for human consumption," and all foodstuffs were frequently subjected to examination by sanitary inspectors. Epidemics were thus averted, and vaccination was employed when they threatened.

But what surprised Horatio Johnbull most was that, only a few miles beyond the zone of the Imperial City, the efforts of the department concerned became feeble and indifferent. The poor workers in the adjacent areas lived in filth and rotted in roofless huts. These humble citizens of the Empire were protected against neither the inclemency of nature, nor the attacks of bacteria. Sanitation was a monopoly of the rich. The poor were not to poach upon the privileges of the wealthy. They lived in dirt and died in sorrow, and no one in the Imperial City mourned over their death; for India was over-populated and could easily afford the loss of these unfortunate human beings. Such was the reaction produced on Horatio Johnbull's mind by a tour through one of these areas.

Such tragic scenes of Indian life cropped up every now and then in their naked ghastliness and their impression did not fade. Horatio Johnbull drifted from one department to another and obtained glimpses of the imperial mechanism in different sections of the Secretariat. He learnt something about the Labour Department, and perhaps a great deal more about the



Commerce Department, which was famous for its open policy and sympathetic attitude towards the overpowering ambitions of Indian commerce and British shipping. He listened patiently and courageously to the long tales of young Under-secretaries, who, in their zeal to advertise their departments, overstepped the mark of courtesy, and bombarded him with all sorts of questions about the relative efficiency of the Home Civil Service.

From these interviews with the guardians of imperialism, Horatio Johnbull saw that India was bound hand and foot by the knotty red-tape. Progress was difficult without the patronage and support of those who wielded invisible power behind the Central Executive. Tradition and inertia were the two strong barriers which the popular voice could not overcome. It was immaterial who wielded this power. Indians became as rigid and unapproachable as the Englishmen when they entered the fortress of imperialism.

A very amusing feature of life in the Imperial City was the chronic habit of forming deputations. In England and other democratic countries, people were accustomed to ventilate their grievances and seek redress through their members and by other means. But in India, even intelligent and well-informed persons made it a mania to form themselves into teams and in this manner present their religious, economic, and political grievances to the authorities concerned. Whether it was a result of the so-called "inferiority complex," or whether it was a habit acquired in ancient times, nobody could tell. There was a vast variety of subjects which these deputations from all parts of India dabbled in. As a matter of curiosity and amusement Horatio Johnbull compiled a long list which included, (a) the discomforts of third class passengers on state railways, (b) the inhuman treatment meted out to political prisoners in jails, (c) the representation of minority communities in subordinate civil services, (d) the prohibition of the playing of musical instruments outside mosque and temples, (e) the complete abolition of

human "untouchability," (f) the grant of adequate funds for the education of Anglo-Indians and domiciled Europeans, (g) the protection of Indian shipping, and the monopoly of coastal traffic for Indian capitalists, (h) the provision of technical institutes for unemployed young men, (i) the protection of Indians residing in the Dominions and British Colonies, and (j) the protection of Indian morals against the demoralising effects of American films.

Horatio Johnbull admired the ingenuity of his own countrymen when he found that, in the majority of cases, the official concerned assured the deputation of sympathetic consideration and early redress of the grievances presented to him. With a few sweet words, the subject-matter of a well-conceived and laboriously-planned deputation was thus consigned to the files. The members of the deputation went home pleased as Punch with the patient hearing given to them, and Red-Tape came out victorious in the end.

The brief intervals between social and official engagements were spent in the charming company of Cynthia Diehard. Sir David was overwhelmed by the pressure of work involved in the organisation of his new department, which, according to him, was to become the centre of gravity of "state safety," and he left the entertainment of their guest in her hands.

Cynthia and Horatio Johnbull had already begun to like and appreciate each other. During the last three years, the former had survived the persistent love-making of young civilians and army officers. Intoxicated, not by whisky and champagne, but by her loving sweetness and ravishing charm, they had sought her love in vain. Cynthia had seen life in many aspects in Europe, and was no longer, impressed with superficial or passing sentiments. She had become steady and sane in her love life.

Horatio Johnbull had suffered in the Great War, and acquired wisdom. He had lived a life of deliberate sensuality for a brief period, and had learnt the value

of restraint. He had known the company of demi-mondes and prostitutes. Love had now become a deep-seated conviction with him. At his age, he couldn't be bothered with the taming of a shrew, nor could he put up with the stupid innocence of a sweet virgin of the "fairy-prince-worship" type. He found in Cynthia a young woman, moderately imaginative and sublimely human, for whom stupid hero worship was folly. Through companionship, a bond of deep affection was developing between the two.

Cynthia had much historical knowledge of Delhi and its environs, and she drove with her guest to various places of interest. She showed him the famous Kutab Minar, one of the lesser known wonders of the world. They visited the ruins of ancient palaces, and their harems, throne-rooms, and assembly-halls. They saw the red glory and fading pomp of the old Fort, which still stood majestically in the outskirts of Delhi. From high balconies, they looked down upon its ramparts and surrounding moats. They walked leisurely through the marble Turkish Baths, where fair maidens and beautiful princesses bathed their graceful limbs in rose water, and anointed their voluptuous young bodies with perfumed oil for the sensuous benefit of their lords and masters. They saw the remnants of the old imperial costumes, and studied similar relics of old customs with particular interest. They spent hours together in gaining these brief glimpses of the splendour of old India, which is indeed nothing more than a wavering shadow of the past and therefore, alas, a suitable subject for tourists and photographers.

One afternoon they drove through the old City. It was vastly different from the new Imperial City. Its principal thoroughfare, the Chandni Chowk, had witnessed massacres in olden times, and political upheavals in modern. It was typically oriental, and yet everything western could be bought from its shops and side bazars. It was the real centre of commercial life of Northern India. It was most visibly and

vigorously active in the afternoons and evenings. On its pavements, greedy traders shouted for customers, and touts ran around on the look-out for gullible visitors. There was a great show of silken fabrics from China and Japan, cheap celluloid toys from Germany, bleached longcloth and fine muslins from Lancashire, shirtings and suitings from Bombay and Ahmedabad, hair-oils and perfumes from Paris, cheap hurricane lanterns and oil-lamps from Czechoslovakia, imitation shawls from Paisley, motor cars and radios from the United States, and bicycles from Birmingham. In this central rendezvous of trade one could haggle for all these and many other commodities. Eastern life was not lazy here. Everyone was buying something, and everyone was keen on striking a bargain. There was an unceasing clamour of noises and shouts from one end of the long thoroughfare to the other.

From all these outings, Cynthia and Horatio Johnbull came back to Roshanara Road with a deeper and deeper sense of unity and friendship. Sir David Diehard, being a "bulwark of imperialism," ridiculed the idea of visiting the "native quarters", but realising that Horatio Johnbull was under the protection of his daughter who knew India and the Indians, he overlooked these harmless breaches of European convention. "My dear boy," he would say, "in Cynthia you have a friend and guide who knows the ropes, and can take you safely through the heart of Indian Delhi."

## CHAPTER XI

### A GALA NIGHT

A red letter day of imperial life in the Imperial City was fixed for Monday, the 7th of December. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was eminently presided over by an honourable member of the Central Government, who had incidentally devoted more of his life to the protection and breeding of animals than to the preservation and upbringing of human beings. He always made it a point to refer to the sufferings of cats, dogs, canaries, parrots, horses, donkeys, cows and bulls, and other dumb animals. Human beings, he maintained, could look after themselves—in summer by doing without clothing and in winter, by squatting around a fire made of dry leaves and twigs—whereas animals, being inarticulate, could only live on human sympathy. It was the duty of every civilized citizen to raise funds for the welfare of animals, and hence it was that the red letter day was fixed in honour of the animal kingdom.

It was a day of social, festive and sporting events. All money derived from the various collections was to be devoted to the protection of animals against the ill-treatment of nature or humanity. Money was, in fact, flowing into the coffers of the Society, and the civilised citizens were having the time of their lives in the Stadium, where games and sports had been going on since an early hour in the morning. Even uncivilised citizens had not missed the opportunity of watching the famous Horse Show, a feature of the programme. Large crowds were assembled to watch the sporting events, and the Imperial City was basking in its own glory under the soothing rays of wintery sunshine.

Large placards decorated the boundary wall of the Stadium. "There is no place in Heaven for those who inflict suffering on Animals;" "Human Beings can look after themselves, Animals must be looked after." Another huge poster announced: "Monkeys represent YOUR origin; treat THEM as brothers." There were several other similar appeals. The most glaring poster was fixed on the top of the main entrance to the Stadium with the words: "COWS are generous to YOU; be generous to THEM."

Society ladies in furs moved about with their pet lap dogs, carrying collection-boxes. Indian ladies wrapped in Kashmir shawls sold flags and tokens in aid of the fund. Religious-minded Hindus appealed to all and sundry for a noble cause, and collected small subscriptions from stall-keepers. College students carried pet monkeys on their shoulders, and whistled for donations. A snake charmer was giving a free exhibition of his cobras and reptiles whilst a Muslim juggler from Rawalpindi was amusing a crowd of youngsters with his puzzling tricks, and was speedily collecting coins for the charity-box. In a remote corner of the Stadium, a popular Urdu poet was reciting some of his ready-made poems in a musical voice to a spell-bound audience. It was a gala day for all.

The most memorable event of the red letter day was the Charity Ball organised by the Honourable Chairman's wife. Since it was the last event of the season invitations had been issued to all officers of the Imperial Secretariat and Army Headquarters. The attention of the Ruling Princes had been drawn to the attractions of the great Charity Ball. The leading merchants and manufacturers of the old city had been asked to join in the festivities, and even unpleasant politicians and labour leaders had been requested to forget political differences for one night. Admission tickets and supper coupons had been sold on a very large scale, and every care had been taken to make the Ball an unqualified success.

The spacious dining-room of Hotel Celina, its alcoves, and its galleries, had been transformed into a brilliant ballroom. The Swiss Manager, Mon. Chalon, had produced a wonderland of glowing lights. Several cocktail bars had also been installed and large tables had been placed in the upper balconies for private parties of princes and politicians. Automatic lighting with coloured neon signs had been installed, whilst elaborate arrangements had been made for serving buffet suppers in the corners of the ballroom. The Viennese orchestra had been augmented, and a military band had also been hired to afford variety. Loud speakers were so arranged that the music could be reproduced in the adjoining rooms. Special enclosures around the dancing floor were reserved for high Government officials and Ruling Princes.

Large crowds began to arrive at 9 p. m., and by 10 the ballroom, the drawing-rooms, and the smoking lounge of Hotel Celina, were overflowing. Aged generals and young subalterns, civilians and diplomats, with their wives or grown-up daughters marched into the ballroom. There was plenty of variety in the colours of the uniforms. The military officers were dressed in scarlet, blue, or fawn regimentals. The diplomats wore the official uniforms of their respective countries. Dark blue coats braided with gold-embroidered neck-bands and cuffs, and decorated with medals of different orders gave the Civil Servants a distinctive appearance. Indian and Burmese officials walked side by side with English. In the cause of the animal kingdom, they had forgotten their routine worries and official importance. They were now in a mood to enjoy themselves.

The Ruling Princes also came in large numbers, resplendent in gold and diamonds and pearls. On their breasts, they carried the symbols of imperial honours conferred upon them by the Paramount Power. Behind them followed their retinues dressed in full evening-dress with the honours given to them by their princely masters. They were all accompanied by their lady

friends who were to act as dancing partners for the evening. Two Provincial Governors who happened to be staying in the Imperial City also joined the throng with their A. D. C's. and Secretaries.

Socialists and extremists had forgotten their feuds and wordy battles with the bureaucracy, and felt at peace with the world and its grievances for one night. A batch of young fire-brands with their sweethearts and women colleagues had arrived from Bombay and had joined the gathering in full force.

Most of the European ladies were dressed in pale-blue and white evening gowns. Light colours and delicate shades were to be seen everywhere. Ugliness was conspicuous by its absence. Young damsels of marriageable age were beaming with joy and youthful bliss, and even elderly dames looked handsome and charming. Indian girls were dressed in crêpe and georgette saris with borders of silver and gold tissues. Their beauty and mellow charm added warmth to the scene.

The music was simply divine. A beautiful continental waltz was being played and the dancers covered the floor with their rhythmic movements. Over two hundred couples swung round the corner, and swayed in the middle of the floor. Music went on, and in between the dances, people made a rush for drinks and other refreshments provided by the amiable Mon. Chalon.

• Sir David Dichard was accompanied by his daughter, Horatio Johnbull, and a young civilian named Joe Moonshine who had lately joined the Reforms Department. A special table had been reserved for the police chief, whose silvery grey hair and aristocratic moustache were well known in the Imperial City. A few paces away from this table, a small enclosure had been reserved for His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar, whom Horatio Johnbull had met on s.s. "*Inconia*." He was accompanied by his two young daughters who were obviously free from the fetters of rigid customs.



and had insisted upon coming to the Charity Ball with their father. The majestic figure of the Maharaja, his dazzling attire and jewellery were noticeable from every corner of the dancing floor.

Right across the ballroom, on the left side of the main entrance, a party of young people occupied a large table. Occasionally they danced fox trots, and sparingly they indulged in mild concoctions of gin, vermouth and lemonade. Politically they belonged to the Bombay group, and had come over to Delhi, to attend the Convention of the All-India National Association. Most of them had been educated in Europe and had acquired the knack of forgetting their political worries to enjoy such festive occasions. The centre of attraction at this table was Miss Indumati Khisku, who had returned to the old city with the double purpose of attending the most important meeting of the year and of discussing some personal affairs with her father. Her friend and comrade, Azadali, was also a member of the party. He was talking to another lady friend named Malini Rai from Lahore, who was one of the leading members of the Punjab group. Jal Feroz and Bango Mukerjee were also with the party.

At 11-30 p. m. there was a pause for supper, during which friends and acquaintances exchanged greetings. Walking to the reserved enclosure, Horatio Johnbull presented Cynthia, her father and Joe Moonshine, to His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar and party. His Highness was delighted to meet the famous police chief, and his daughters, Amar Kaur and Amrit Kaur, were charmed to make the acquaintance of Cynthia Diehard and her friends. In his charming manner, His Highness implored them all to pay a visit to his capital in January. He assured them that they would be well looked after, and that arrangements for a special tiger hunt would be made. Horatio Johnbull accepted the invitation with grateful thanks, in the hope that Cynthia and her father would also join him in Premnagar.

The notes of a Brazilian Tango were struck, and once again, the dancers flowed on the floor. Cynthia and Horatio Johnbull were moving slowly and gracefully in the crowd of dancing couples. Suddenly, they saw Indumati dancing with Azadali. Although the crowd was thick, no one who understood the music and dancing, could fail to see the natural charm of the graceful steps and movements of this Indian couple. While passing through the crowd, Indumati smiled a witching smile, and Horatio Johnbull acknowledged it with a friendly nod. Cynthia had known the girl well in her younger days, and was anxious to meet her again. But she was wondering how and where Horatio Johnbull had met this charming Hindu girl. "Don't you think Indumati looks divine in her pale-mauve sari?" she asked him. He nodded assent.

As soon as the dance was over, Indumati excused herself from her companions and rushed across to Sir David's table. The old man rose from his chair and kissing the girl on the forehead said: "Why hasn't your father appeared this evening? I thought he was a keen supporter of the cause. Do sit down and have a little sauterne with us. Cynthia, look after your old friend and introduce her to everybody."

They squeezed another chair around the table, and Indumati sat down with an apology for not having called on Cynthia. She explained that her father, who was opposed to her political views, refused to come to the Charity Ball with her friends and companions from Bombay. Sir David said that he agreed with the Rai Bahadur, and told Indumati that, although he had no intention of spoiling her evening with political talk, he didn't like the idea of young girls of her age and personal charm messing about with the labour movement. If she was really keen on public work, she could have easily taken up the medical line and helped the poor who needed medical relief in all parts of India; but to associate herself with hot-headed young men in the

socialistic group was certainly ungrateful to her own father who had sacrificed many comforts to educate her.

With almost filial regard, Indumati listened to the old man's fatherly advice, remained silent, and then diverted the topic of conversation to Cynthia's beautiful gown.

Turning later towards Horatio Johnbull, she said : "You must come to the special convention of the All-India National Association on Wednesday next. Our progressive group from Bombay is already here, and we are out to oppose the 'office acceptance resolution.' You will hear some really fine speeches on Indian nationalism. Bring Cynthia with you. I can manage seats for both of you in the visitors' enclosure."

"My dear young lady," said Horatio Johnbull, "I should love to come if I'm not detained by Sir David, who, as you know, belongs to the 'law and order' group and would certainly place all possible obstacles in the way of my attending your Convention. However, Cynthia and I will so arrange matters that his peace of mind is not disturbed. What sayest thou, Cynthia?"

"Indumati knows my personal views on Indian politics," answered Cynthia reassuringly. "So long as there's no violence, I've no objection to attending these meetings."

"Well, it's settled then," said Horatio Johnbull. "If Indumati finds us two respectable seats, we shall march into the camp of national glory." Inclining his head towards Indumati he asked in a whispering voice : "How's your charming young man this evening?"

Indumati answered with a blush that Azadali was enjoying himself but as he was entertaining comrades from the Punjab, he was unable to leave the table. After a moment's hesitation, she asked: "How did you enjoy that long discussion on Indian agriculture with my father? Soon after my arrival, he gave me a full account of his conversations with you, and admired your sympathetic attitude towards Indian problems.

At the present moment, he is simply disgusted with me as I gave him an indirect hint that, one of these days, I might marry outside my community."

"I was charmed to meet your father," said Horatio Johnbull frankly. "He was exceedingly polite and painstaking with me. If I were you I wouldn't defy his wishes in regard to your marriage. He's very fond of you, and would feel terribly hurt if your marriage outside your community turned out to be a failure."

Indumati was surprised to hear Horatio Johnbull's narrow view of marriage and filial obedience. "We will talk about it some other time," she said evasively, and after wishing everybody good night, she returned to her own table.

With brief intervals, the orchestral music went on changing from fox trot to waltz, and then, to Tango and Rhumba, and back again to the popular one-step. The dancing couples continued to dance and drink till the early hours of the morning. After 2 a. m. official and unofficial parties began to disappear from the scene of festivity. At 4 a. m. the famous Charity Ball came to a glorious end. The animals of India, both indigenous and hybrid, had gained considerably through the efforts of the Honourable Chairman. Even human beings gained a little through their temporary employment at the Stadium. The Charity Ball was a phenomenal success of the social season.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE NATIONAL MIRROR

The Charity Ball had fully justified the expectations of its organisers, and the Society for the Protection of Animals had correspondingly benefitted.

Now came the question of the welfare of human beings. The All-India National Association, popularly known as the *Kaumi Aina* (i pronounced as *ce*), or the National Mirror, had fixed Wednesday, the 9th of December, as the red letter day for the protection and preservation of the political rights of the people. They had previously made a determined stand against cruelty to human beings, and now they had gathered in Delhi, the old capital of a very old kingdom, to formulate a definite national policy in regard to the New Constitution.

The *Kaumi Aina* was the central organisation of Indian nationalism. Although there were several societies and leagues, this particular Association was not only the oldest but also the most representative organised body in the country. So long as a man believed in the political and economic emancipation of the masses, and pledged himself to resist all forms of exploitation, he could join the Association as a member, irrespective of caste, colour or creed. As a matter of fact, in the initial stages of the movement, even Englishmen gave a helping hand to the Association. The spiritual simplicity and the selflessness of its leader had captured the imagination of the poverty-stricken masses even in the remotest parts of India. There was, as it were, a divine halo around his name and personality. Through his influence, the *Kaumi Aina* had gradually gathered into

its folds men and women of all classes of society. Socialists, social democrats, national socialists, and labourites, had all affiliated themselves to the central organisation one by one.

It was alleged by the so-called loyalists that some black sheep in the national movement had used it for personal gain, and with the help of such appeals and slogans as "Help Indian Industries," "Insure your Life and Property with Indian Companies," "Buy Indian and make your MOTHER COUNTRY prosperous," etc., had made vast fortunes, and had never given a fraction of their gains to the movement through which they had become wealthy. There were others who, it was stated, had abandoned their connection with the Association at an early stage, because the Government had given them lucrative jobs. These alleged deserters now jeered and declared: "We are nationalists at heart and as patriotic as anyone in the Kaumi Aina, but we cannot endorse their creed, nor support their methods."

It was known throughout the world that, the vast majority of the leaders and workers of the All-India National Association had suffered, like early Christian martyrs, for the masses of India. They had gone to jails willingly and smilingly, and had suffered indignities at the hands of the police. Some of them had given up their professional work, and had even renounced the fortunes left by their fathers. Foreign observers who witnessed the scenes of the various stages of the non-violent movement had nothing but praise for the heroism and self-sacrifice displayed by these champions of the national ideal. They could disagree with them, they could perhaps disapprove of their methods, but they could not, in all sincerity, condemn them as self-seekers.

An endless number of men and women from all parts of India flocked to the Convention. In spite of the bitterness of the cold weather, they were clad quite simply. The red turbans and crimson shorts of the

Frontier volunteers were conspicuous. The round muslin caps of the peasants from the United Provinces were seen side by side with the popular *khaddar* caps of the delegates from Bombay and Central India. The dignified *pugree* of the Punjabi patriot was no less imposing than the multi-coloured *safa* of the member from Ajmer and Rajputana. Representatives from Bengal and Madras looked distinctive in their beautiful dhoties, long shirts, and bare heads. Since foreign fabrics and dress materials were tabooed, almost everybody wore garments made out of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth.

They had travelled long distances to join in the Convention. Some were smiling smiles of optimism, while others were gazing straight ahead towards the goal of Indian unity. In spite of their varying shades of colour and differing symbols of religion, they appeared to be men and women endowed with a unique singleness of purpose. The sacred cause of their motherland was writ large on their faces.

A large pavilion with floor accommodation for nearly five thousand people had been erected in one of the extensive parks outside the old city, and loud speakers had been specially installed to enable the more distant hearers to hear the speeches. A large dais, about two feet higher than the ground level, had been built at the northern end of the pavilion, and on both sides of the dais, seats had been provided for the press and visitors. The entire floor of the pavilion was covered with beautiful Indian carpets and rugs. National flags with green and orange stripes decorated the pillars supporting the pavilion. There were no other decorations.

At 8-45 a. m., the pavilion was filled with members and delegates. Volunteers in national costumes, and bearing national colours, were in readiness to maintain order. Members of the Central Committee, hoary-headed Indian politicians, middle-aged leaders and young firebrands, were all seated around the low presidential desk. The visitors' enclosure contained foreign

tourists, consular agents, and a large number of Indian merchants and capitalists from Bombay, Ahmedabad and Calcutta. In red, blue and yellow ready-made turbans, the latter sought fresh inspiration for their business campaigns; for, in those days, the trend of speculation depended, to an appreciable extent, on the political attitude of the National Mirror. The press enclosure was also filled to capacity. Liberal, moderate and extreme newspapers had all sent their representatives. Even some of the London dailies had their Indian reporters at this gigantic gathering.

A few minutes after nine, Cynthia and Horatio Johnbull took their seats in the visitors' enclosure. They were both impressed with the solemnity of the proceedings. They could never have believed the immense power and prestige enjoyed by the Central Committee, if they had not attended the Convention in person.

The proceedings opened with a simple prayer to the Almighty God for divine guidance. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews and Christians all joined the chorus of universal faith, without hurt to their own orthodoxy.

Although the Sage of Sabarmati was in the midst of his disciples, he declined to occupy the presidential seat. The chair was offered to a middle-aged, though youthful-looking, leader who had made his mark on the political history of India by his selfless devotion to the national cause. In the midst of prolonged applause and echoes of 'Bande Mataram,' Ramanujan rose from his seat and commenced his presidential speech in high-flown Urdu. An English translation of the speech was also available for those visitors and members who were not conversant with the flowery expressions of Persianised Urdu.

"Ladies, Friends, and Countrymen," began the President in a clear and vibrant voice. "We have gathered here this morning to consider our future policy in regard to the New Constitution, which, despite our protests and opposition, became law last year. For the past six years we have resisted the attempts of an



alien bureaucracy to foist upon us a newly-disguised system of sectarian democracy. Since these attempts have already become accomplished facts, we must reconsider our position.

"The First of April 1937, or what is humorously known as 'All Fools' Day' is not very far off. Elections to the Provincial Legislatures under the new scheme of Provincial Autonomy will take place in the near future. Are we to stand aloof and watch from a distance, or are we to organise our forces to capture the legislatures for better or for worse? These are the questions which we have to decide today.

"Before presenting my personal views on the subject, I should like to show you a picture of the inner working of the political machine installed in our country in 1920.

"The Montford Reforms, as you are all aware, were hailed by our liberal friends as the harbingers of national freedom. A small body of wealthy merchants and prosperous lawyers actually believed that self-Government was in sight. Fortunately for us, the country as a whole did not share this belief with them. The people soon came to know that the system of elections was a masterpiece of political jugglery.

"You are not unfamiliar with the irregular network of constituencies and the jig-saw puzzle of franchise. Men with known financial means, men with a cheap hallmark of a university degree, landlords and rent collectors, landowners and their wealthy tenants, bankers and factory owners, and other sundry representatives of commerce and industry who could produce evidence of a visible income were eligible for membership of the much coveted Legislative Council. The poor voter wondered whether the lawmaking capacity of a prospective councillor depended on the visibility or invisibility of his financial status. In his ignorance and innocence he gave struggling barristers, briefless lawyers, university examiners, war-profiteers, uneducated landowners, communal bigots, job-hunters and title-seekers

the benefit of his vote, and allowed them for all these years to indulge in law-making and also to enjoy the social prestige that goes with the job.

"The result was that the chosen representatives of the carefully enfranchised population continued to function as if they were ex-officio Directors of the Indian Joint Stock Administration Company, with no real responsibility to the shareholders. Their duty was to hold their jobs, and to make a good show of their quasi-patriotic feelings in the seasonal legislative exhibitions organised for their amusement under the various political enactments.

"And now let me refer very briefly to the executive machinery of the Central Government. Those of you who have had opportunities of studying its working at close quarters, either inside the Assembly or elsewhere, know full well that it was a pure and simple oligarchy controlled by the selected few and the civil service, who could always rely upon the 'certification' of any measure that they proposed to place on the Statute Book. Discussions of national importance on the floor of the House were quite as farcical as the elections and nominations. The Swarajist members of the Assembly could stage as many 'walk-outs' as they liked without disturbing the peace of mind of the honourable members on the Treasury benches, as the latter were immune from the censure of the people whom they governed.

"Our problems are well known throughout the country, and so is the fact that the last sixteen years have been wasted in a useless political experiment. Heart-rending poverty and illiteracy still stare us in the face. Unemployment is increasing amongst all classes of the population. Cultivators are still unable to eke out two square meals a day from their miserably small holdings. The poor farmer is still overwhelmed with debts. The village artisan is still unable to earn enough to keep the home fire burning. The speculators, and the protected and subsidised industrial magnates are still squeezing blood out of the peasants, artisans

and factory workers. The ever-increasing army of highly-paid Government officials is still going strong.

"The question before us this morning for immediate decision is this: Are we as the most representative political body in the country going to stand aloof and watch developments, or are we going to establish our majority in the Provincial Councils? In order to refresh your memory, I shall place before you the most obvious features of the new Act.

"In the first place, I must point out that the new Act is not a charter of liberty, nor is it even the semblance of Dominion Status. On the contrary, it perpetuates the old regime in a newly-disguised form, and aims at completing the picture of self-government at some distant date, which cannot be calculated in terms of years. It gives you a much wider franchise; but it imposes all kinds of communal and sectarian restrictions, and widens the gulf between the various communities.

"There is another point on which, I am sure, most of you will agree with me, and that is that we do not want the same actors with the same old ambitions to re-appear on the political stage in the same old settings. We must prevent the old comedy of elections and selections. In short, history must not repeat itself in the re-appearance of the old cast. And this can only be achieved by an overwhelming effort on our part to secure the support of the masses. I am confident that, in the majority of provinces, the people will respond to our national call, and we shall secure undoubted victories.

"The fact that we are determined to work for the uplift of the masses is no longer a secret. Even our worst enemies must acknowledge our moral force. My own idea is that with our programme of national reconstruction before us, we cannot afford to throw away whatever opportunities are offered to us for national service. By standing aloof we can achieve nothing. By facing the elections in a bold and spirited way we can at least make an honest attempt to end the exploitation of our people and prevent our

opponents from making a complete hash of our national life. The major issue is now perfectly clear to you, and it is for you to decide as to whether we shall go ahead fearlessly with our programme of national service or follow the old course of non-co-operation."

The scene of silent and solemn appreciation turned into one of uproarious applause as soon as Ramanujan resumed his seat. As is generally the case in political gatherings of a nation-wide character, the methods of approach vary from group to group. The men representing the textile interests of Bombay and Ahmedabad were national in their outlook; but they had to look after their dividends, and were therefore keen on having a period of "peace and prosperity." They were determined to secure the co-operation of the National Mirror in getting the New Constitution duly established.

On the other hand, the socialists, though small in numbers, were opposed to compromise. They demanded the rejection of the new Act and opposed the exploitation of the workers by Indian capitalists. It was not possible, they said, to introduce changes and reforms through the New Constitution. The Swarajist group adopted a middle course and advocated a fair trial of the newly-proposed democracy. They were of the opinion that the ultimate goal of complete independence could only be reached by gradual stages. It was therefore advisable to make the present scheme a stepping stone for the future.

There were, as usual, many speeches by leading politicians and thinkers. Azadali gave the viewpoint of his own party in a vehement and well-worded speech. He was inclined to make the best of a bad bargain. Jotindra Babu from Calcutta pleaded the cause of the Hindus of Bengal, and threatened to resign from the Central Committee if prompt action were not taken to readjust the numerical strength of his group in the Provincial Legislature. Pandit Acharya from Madras spoke of organising a campaign to oust the

political nincompoops from office. He held that the National Mirror should be made the sole guardian of the people's rights. Seth Amarchand Hiralal and Sir Gopaldas Nemidas both spoke of peace and goodwill. They were of the opinion that, if the National Mirror were to adopt an attitude of aloofness and non-co-operation, the Stock Exchanges of Bombay and Ahmedabad would fall to pieces.

The delegates from Kathiawar believed in Fascism and centrally-controlled capitalism. They declared their faith in Mussolini's methods of administration, and showed the audience how the great Italian Dictator had rescued his country from chaos. One of them sang the praises of National Socialism and advocated Hitlerian methods in public affairs. He referred to the remarkable achievements of the German Dictator in the field of internal reconstruction.

Ashraf Hasan from Lucknow gave a lamentable tale of the cultivator and his perpetual poverty; of the grinding down of the peasantry by the landed proprietor who squandered away fortunes in wine and women in Europe.

Sardar Puransingh Gulati, who represented the subjects of the Indian States, had his own story of woe and suffering. He not only condemned the new Act, but called it an invention of the devil, inasmuch as it ignored the rights and interests of millions of helpless Indians. He gave a strikingly vivid description of the slavery of the people living in Indian India. In his powerful Punjabi voice he shouted out his invectives against the princely order, and declared that, unless the subjects of the States were allowed to elect their own representatives to the Federal Parliament, he and his colleagues would have nothing to do with this "*Shaitani Machine*." His party had no use for the hirelings, hunchbacks, procurers, and selected spokesmen of the Princes and Nawabs. The National Mirror, he said, should not allow Indians to rot away in poverty and slavery.

There were many more speeches from delegates and members. The trend of opinion was obvious. Since the President had already indicated his own mind, the opposition to the question of council entry was feeble. Moreover, it was realised that the results of the forthcoming elections would demonstrate the real strength of the All-India National Association. It was also felt that aloofness would enable the small batch of capitalists and landowners to secure undisturbed power over the whole country. Diplomacy and field tactics demanded that the National Mirror should appeal to the masses and through them reach the battlefields of the Provincial Legislature.

At 1 p. m., the issue of the day was settled by a large majority in favour of council entry. A unanimous resolution was passed to the effect that all Provincial Committees of the Kaumi Aina should strive their utmost to secure the success of the national candidates. The Convention then came to a peaceful and hopeful conclusion.

Cynthia and Horatio Johnbull were both introduced to the President, by Indumati. After thanking Azadali for the trouble he had taken on their behalf, they departed in the midst of a moving stream of humanity, and left the park by a small side gateway.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A MATRIMONIAL TANGLE

The Imperial city was getting bitterly cold. There were cloudy heralds of early winter rains. The stout pillars of imperial wisdom were already making preparations for their move to Calcutta, where the winter is neither too cold nor too warm. There was hurry, bustle and commotion.

And in the midst of all this, there was a whispering gossip about the forthcoming abdication of the King-Emperor. By some invisible means, the news had already leaked out. American gossip-mongers had allowed certain rumours to filter through the higher social circles of New Delhi. Sir David Diehard was perturbed and Horatio Johnbull was curious about the final decisions in London.

As an important member of the Indian Police Force, as a staunch supporter of Britain's orthodox traditions, and as a guardian of the Imperial prestige, Sir David could not tolerate the idea of a legal matrimonial alliance between the British King and a commoner from the other side of the Atlantic. To him, as to other Englishmen of his school, it was a personal calamity; and in such calamities he was not charitably inclined even towards Royalty. Feelings were running high, emotions were being unnecessarily aroused. Even ordinary assistant secretaries were disputing the private rights of a monarch whom they had acknowledged as their liege lord only a few months ago.

At last, on the 12th of December 1936, the atmosphere was detensioned and the situation cleared by the historical Instrument of Abdication. Gossip ceased

to circulate, and there was tranquillity once again, and also an unholy rush for Calcutta! The whole city became a travelling circus. Hat boxes, trunks, suitcases, portmanteaus, and hold-alls were again moving in flocks towards the railway station. The Imperial City was being slowly and steadily depopulated. The princes and their retinues had already left. Government officials were booking their seats, and red-liveried peons were everywhere active. Even politicians, both national and cosmopolitan, had deserted the old city by this time. Only those who had business to transact, or those who resided permanently under the shadow of Imperial glory remained there.

Azadali and his comrade, Indumati, had forgotten their personal objective in the midst of political discussions and social activities. One of the objects for which they had both hurried to Delhi was to persuade the old Rai Bahadur to consent to their marriage. Azadali was not a sensualist who fell rapturously in love with a woman as soon as he saw a well-shaped pair of ankles or a gracefully-sloping long neck. He could not concentrate his whole passion on any one part of a beautiful woman's body. With him, love was something deeper than a pair of smiling eyes or a pair of longing lips. It permeated his whole life. It demanded constancy and comradeship. It reached its climax in physical union through intellectual sympathy and deep understanding.

• Indumati, being the eldest daughter of the Imperial Superintendent of Agriculture, was a pet and pride of the whole family. She had already attained majority, and was now heading towards her twenty-second year. She had, like many other daughters of the North, a fair complexion, a dignified nose with an aquiline touch, Indo-Scythian features, dark brown hair with a natural wave, and a determined face with a winning smile. For reasons best known to her friends of early days, she had been nicknamed Tubby, and this comic name stuck to her throughout her life.



After graduating from the Punjab University at the age of nineteen, Indumati had spent two years in England, France, Germany and Switzerland. In one of her flying visits to Paris, she had met Azadali in a particularly Bohemian restaurant, and within a week had developed deep affection for this budding socialist. Contrary to her father's hopes she had gradually embraced socialism and acquired an anti-imperial outlook. On her return to India in 1935, she definitely refused to marry the man of her father's choice, a young officer in the Provincial Civil Service, who had neither brains nor courage to satisfy even the most modest demands of her intellectual life. Moreover, she had no use for official glamour and social popularity. She had plunged herself into national work and had come to the conclusion that socialism was the only salvation of the wretched lot of her poorly-placed sisters. Mental sympathy and continued association in a common cause had influenced her to such an extent that, in order to marry Azadali, she was fully prepared to forsake her people and incur the displeasure of her father. The very idea of his daughter marrying a Muslim husband was repugnant to the Brahminic nature of the old Rai Bahadur. The situation for the two young lovers was, therefore, menacing and full of obstacles.

After considerable hesitation, Azadali made up his mind to meet his future father-in-law on Sunday, the 13th of December. He knew that there would be an unpleasant wordy battle at the interview, and perhaps a final "no" at the end of it; but anxious as he was to avoid a social scandal, he made a determined effort to deal with his matrimonial tangle in the ordinary way.

Despite his intense dislike for those who preached socialistic doctrines and fomented labour troubles, the Rai Bahadur received Azadali in a very courteous and dignified manner in his stately drawing room, at 10 in the morning.

"It's a marvellous surprise to see you after such a

long time," he said, as he shook hands with his visitor. And then offering him a comfortable arm-chair he continued: "Your speech at the Convention was rather daring, I should imagine."

"I wonder if the press reporters gave an exaggerated version of what I did not say at the meeting," answered Azadali smilingly.

"My dear boy," retorted the Rai Bahadur, "it is not for me to preach loyalty and moderation to you. I only want you to realise that it would cause pain to your poor father if he knew that you were playing with fire all the time. Moreover, the name of my innocent and harmless daughter, Indumati is associated with yours in the political world, and I am certainly anxious for her sake to put a stop to this morbid doctrine of 'equality for all'. There can be no equality for all. We are born unequal and we shall remain unequal in this good old world of ours. If a man is born a King or a Maharaja, you can't drag him down to the level of a shopkeeper and tell him that, since we are all equals, he must become a shopkeeper for the rest of his life. No Sir, you will never succeed in equalising human beings."

Azadali was flabbergasted at the Rai Bahadur's ignorance of socialism and its implications. But as he was anxious to make the path of his matrimonial proposal smooth, he adopted a conciliatory tone and said: "I'm very sorry to know that you have completely misunderstood the meaning of socialism. We are not trying to introduce a mathematical equation of equality in the sense which you have expressed just now. We are aiming at the reorganisation of society in matters of production and distribution, and we wish to improve the conditions of the working classes by quick methods. I have discussed some of our doctrines with our mutual friend, Horatio Johnbull, who seems to agree with me that some sort of dynamic change is urgently needed in India. However, let us close this topic, for politics are not good for one's digestion on a Sunday morning."

"And what else is good for one's digestion, may I ask?" asked the Rai Bahadur, in a tone of annoyance. Just at that moment, Indumati slipped into the drawing room through one of the doors connected with the study. After exchanging a glance and a smile with Azadali, she sat down next to her father on the chester field.

"Oh, here comes Tubby" said Azadali jovially. "Let us ask her what topic of conversation is most appetising on a Sunday morning."

"I'm sure the least appetising topic is imperialism," answered Indumati in a semi-serious way. Turning to her father, she said: "Daddy, why can't we talk something more cheerful than poverty and loyalty."

"My dear child," said the Rai Bahadur imperiously and paternally. "I am not inclined to view with favour your political and socialistic utterances and actions. Just before you came in, I was warning Azadali against the doctrine of the 'equalisation of human beings.'"

"Well, what's the matter with that doctrine?" answered Indumati. "If you are trying to equalise bulls with a view to producing a pedigree stock, why shouldn't we strive to produce a better race of human beings? Don't you think that human workers should be treated somewhat better than the live-stock about which so much fuss is being made all over the country?"

It was impossible for the Imperial Superintendent to give a rational answer to so rational a question. He waved his hands and laughed aloud. "Oh, dear me," he said, "we are again drifting into politics. Let us hear what else Azadali has to say on a cold Sunday morning."

Azadali was seeking an opportunity of introducing the topic of his intended marriage. He was glad of this diversion. After collecting his thoughts, he said in a serious, steady and balanced voice: "I don't know whether you are aware that Tubby and I have been real pals for some time. Through comradeship and under-

standing, we have developed intense affection for each other, and our future happiness lies in our legal union. Although it isn't necessary for us to seek your permission, we have decided to ask your consent to our marriage. May I implore you to give us your blessing?"

The Rai Bahadur was staggered. He was almost fainting with rage. The blue blood of his Brahminic ancestry rose to his head. He said nothing for a long time and then, mastering his emotion: "Young man," he said in a quietly regulated voice, "I was not fully aware of your beastly scheme. I had heard whispers in the Club. I had been warned against this possibility by my esteemed friend, Sir David Diehard. Even Cynthia hinted at your intimacy the other day. But I could never imagine that you would steal the affections of my daughter through all this humanitarian bunkum. I could never dream that this harmony of intellectual interests would lead to such an impudent and vicious request on your part."

After a brief pause, the Rai Bahadur added: "There is not a single instance in the history of our noble family, which points to the breach of the accepted and honoured convention that a Brahmin girl shall always marry a Brahmin of the ancient stock. My daughter could have easily married a fine Pandit who is now officiating as a District Judge. But, after her return from Europe, she rejected this handsome offer and broke the engagement. I thought that she was not satisfied with a member of the Provincial Civil Service. So I looked for someone in the Imperial Service, and succeeded in finding a young and handsome Pandit who is occupying a high position in the Imperial Department of Archaeology. And now I am asked to consent to her marriage with a Muslim revolutionary! Do you think that I shall ever give my consent to such an unholy alliance?"

Azadali was genuinely distressed by this violent outburst. Since early childhood, he had learnt the lesson of respect for his elders, and did not wish to wound the feelings of a man who was turning grey in the

philosophy of the old school. He knew that logical reasoning was useless in the case of people brought up to believe blindly in the purity of the race, and in the sanctity of religious customs. Reason could not change their inherited convictions.

He pondered for some time and then said quietly : " I'm surprised that you take such an antediluvian view of marriage. There is neither sense nor wisdom in your remarks about your ancient stock. . Do you know that both inter-breeding and in-breeding lead to lunacy and mental weakness ? It has been definitely proved that the intermingling of remote types produces children of a higher standard of intelligence and physique. It is believed that the present high status of the British race is a result of the mixture of the Romans, the Nordics, the Celts and the Teutons. Am I not therefore right in saying that your notions are based on false pride and lack of scientific knowledge ? "

" Scientific knowledge be damned once and for all," thundered the Rai Bahadur. " I am concerned with the traditional practices of my family, and shall not tolerate my daughter's marriage with a Muslim whose rituals are so totally different from those of a Brahmin. Do you realise that if I were to consent to your marriage, my wife would commit suicide and my community would turn me out. There would be a disgraceful end to all my worldly ambitions. No, no, I shall never be a party to this alliance.

" The question of religion doesn't enter into the discussion," said Azadali calmly. " Both Tubby and I are free-thinkers and don't believe in the rituals prescribed by our highly capitalised Pandits and Maulvis. As intelligent beings we adhere to the codes of honour evolved by society for its own preservation through the centuries. My Muslim\*birth should not, therefore, stand in the way of our legal union."

The Rai Bahadur was astounded to hear that his daughter was a free-thinker, and that she did not believe in the religious codes prescribed by the ancient

*Rishis.* Loving his eldest daughter as he did, this gave him unbearable pain. He could not understand the surrender of old-established beliefs to the whims of modern social reformers. He turned round to Indumati, and in a slightly emotional voice gave vent to his feelings. "Surely, my eldest daughter," he said, "had not discarded the holy precepts and beliefs of her forefathers? We Brahmins have survived centuries of oppression and have maintained our prominent position in the Hindu fold. We were tortured and taxed during the seventeenth century; we were forced to accept conversion as the only means of escape from brutal treatment. Most of us defied these tortures and taxes and preserved our religious identity. And, now, in my own household, I find that my eldest daughter has turned a freethinker. Whatever that may mean in actual practice, I would certainly stop at nothing short of murder to prevent my daughter's conversion into a faith which has been bravely and nobly resisted by her forefathers."

Indumati could not longer keep quiet at this painful interview. She was feeling terribly sad and depressed, and wanted to explain her innermost thoughts to her raging father.

"Listen to me, father," she said, "there is no sense in attaching too much religious and racial importance to this subject. The world is changing rapidly and India, though slow in her march, is also heading towards a higher and richer civilisation. I do hope that you will not object to my honesty and frankness when I tell you that, if marriage, or sex in general, were given a divine dignity and its holy function were subjected to religious administration, the human race would degenerate and become impotent. It's a deeply personal question; though it becomes impersonal when linked to society as a whole. Any taboos imposed upon marriage by parents are bound to result in unpleasant and unhealthy reactions upon the children. We are living in an age of free social contacts between the sexes.

How can you possibly impede the flow of sex energy by dictating your choice to me? The flow must find its natural level sooner or later."

The Rai Bahadur interrupted the argument, and said: "I have no intention of impeding the flow; but surely, I have my paternal right to direct it into healthy channels."

"The channels indicated by you," answered Indumati, "are to my mind, not only unhealthy, but positively dangerous. You rely upon tradition, upon racial purity, upon religious beliefs, and upon astrological suitability. But you do not realise that, sex is no longer governed by planetary influences and priestly interpretation of stars. Most of the ancient practices have already changed, and some are still changing for a healthier social order. We women have freed ourselves from the bondage of seclusion and ignorance. Some of us are participating in social and political movements. The traditional barber is no longer necessary for the discovery of a suitable bridegroom for an educated young woman, nor is there any need for the family priest to indulge in futile match-making. The element of mystery and horror imposed by religion is fast disappearing. Under these changed social conditions, I don't see why you should object to my marriage with a man who is admittedly above the common run of people within our own community, and who, above all, is not tainted with religious bigotry and narrow-mindedness."

"My dear child," said the Rai Bahadur, "it is my love for you that prompts me to oppose this marriage. My instinct tells me that a marriage which is against the canons of our ancient *Shastras* can never be a success. You have just referred to the changed conditions of society; but let me tell you that our own society has not changed to such an extent as to tolerate this preposterous union. I am sure, even my English friends would never approve of it. Your own mother would never admit you into the house, if she survives the first shock. I am definitely opposed to it and I cannot give

•  
you my consent. You are both grown-up people, and if you persist in your folly, it will be your own misfortune."

While listening to Tubby's arguments, Azadali was hoping that in the light of them the proposal might appeal to the Rai Bahadur. But the final judgement of the orthodox Brahmin convinced him of the utter futility of further words.

"I am grieved," he said sadly, "that you are not prepared to give your consent. It would be treachery on our part to hide the facts from you. Since you have finally rejected my request, I wish to make it clear that Tubby and I have decided to get married to-morrow under the Civil Marriage Act. We shall both miss your blessing; but we hope that, in due course, our happiness in married life will cause you to change your mind when you will once again bestow upon your daughter the affection she richly deserves. In so far as I am concerned, I feel confident that my actions, my manner of living and my unalloyed love for Tubby will win over your regard one of these days. I am sorry to have caused this scene; but I do hope that you will forgive me."

With a farewell nod and an indifferent handshake Azadali left the house of the Imperial Superintendent of Agriculture and drove back to his hotel.

There was an atmosphere of subdued mourning in the Rai Bahadur's house. There were secluded conferences amongst the members of the family. There were repeated conversations on the telephone with Sir David Diehard and other officials of high standing. And finally it was decided that the Rai Bahadur should adopt an attitude of dignified indifference and leave his daughter's matrimonial future to her own devices.

On Monday, the 14th of December, at an auspicious hour in the forenoon, a small party of friends and comrades gathered in the office of the Registrar of Civil Marriages to witness the legalisation of the union of two prominent social workers. Simply clad in beautiful



Indian garments, the couple took their seats opposite the official, and repeated the usual formula—the formula which enables two respectable, and even disreputable, persons of opposite sexes to sleep in the same bed and under the same roof without incurring the censure of society. Cynthia Diehard and Horatio Johnbull had joined the party in response to Indumati's wishes, and were glad to sign their names as witnesses in the marriage register. Jal Feroz and three other comrades from Bombay had stayed back in Delhi to see the simple wedding ceremony. The whole affair was over in less than half an hour, and two socialists of Modern India were united in marriage without the blessings of their parents. In spite of superstition and orthodoxy, destiny fulfilled its purpose by uniting two individuals for whom humanity existed without the barriers of castes and creeds.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CYNTHIA FALLS IN LOVE

Horatio Johnbull had obtained a panoramic view of life in the Imperial City, and had collected useful information on diverse topics of administration and politics. He had studied the methods of the various imperial services, and had also felt the national pulse through the momentous discussions of the Special Convention. He had seen Indian life in the old city, and also the glamour and splendour of the New Capital. A series of pictures had passed before him, and as yet he had not been able to crystallise his impressions into a harmonious whole. In order to widen the scope of his knowledge, and to study the political situation in Bengal, he decided to leave for Calcutta on Thursday, the 17th of December.

There was another matter which gave Horatio Johnbull food for thought. During the last few days of his stay in the Imperial City, he had suddenly discovered the emptiness of a lonely life and the futility of temporary sex indulgences. His regard for Cynthia had deepened into love. Her courageous approval of Indumati's intention to marry Azadali and her subsequent attempts to persuade the Rai Bahadur to give his consent, convinced him of her broad-minded nature and her sympathetic attitude. He could surmise the depth of her feelings towards him; but could not gauge the intensity of her love sufficiently to make a conventional proposal. Had he belonged to a Latin race, he would have jumped at the first opportunity of making a passionate display of his feelings. He was an Anglo-Saxon, not only in racial origin, but also in

temperament. He loved Cynthia in the Anglo-Saxon way and suffered silently.

On the physical side, too, the charm and freshness of a young English woman who had spent a large part of her early life at boarding-school in England and who had also seen Bohemian life in Paris and Vienna, exercised no small influence on the awakening of those desires which Horatio Johnbull had hidden so long. Education had not turned Cynthia into a Victorian "blue stocking," nor did she suffer from the prudery complex. Her natural laughter, her placid freedom of movement, her frank expression of views on matters sexual and social, her sweet sympathy—all these created "physical" impressions on his mind, and intensified his longing to make Cynthia his own body and soul.

Cynthia's own feelings were also gaining strength. She had grown fonder and fonder of Horatio Johnbull, and had at last fallen in love with him. She had not seduced him, or even encouraged him in the way that some modern girls do to secure their matrimonial future. She had allowed him to study her, to feel the pressure of her hand, to indulge in friendly talks, and to give her a loving look every now and then. She adored his habitual reserve, and liked his subdued love-making. She admired his open-minded attitude towards all social and intellectual problems, and derived great joy from listening to his stories of his early life. The difference in years between them acted more as a brake on sex than as a damper on friendship. She suddenly realised that life would be vacant without him. Since he must adhere to the programme of his tour, she did not persuade him to spend the Christmas holidays in the Imperial City. Although every limb of her beautiful body ached with that desire of consummation which soothes the nerves only after a healthy gratification of one's supreme wishes, she made up her mind to console herself with love letters and occasional telephone talks.

On Thursday morning, soon after breakfast, the little family sat around the drawing-room fire. As is usual with all elderly Englishmen in India, Sir David Diehard was giving Horatio Johnbull friendly tips about life in Calcutta. He warned him against association with young revolutionaries and told him that, although the Government of Bengal had suppressed terrorism and had taken drastic measures to prevent acts of violence, the movement was still active in certain subterranean channels. He advised him against adopting a sympathetic attitude towards young socialists. He quoted incidents from personal experience and gave him some interesting details of the activities of the central police organisation in Calcutta, in the building up of which he had played an important part years ago.

Cynthia laughed at her father's fears and advised Horatio Johnbull to go everywhere and meet everybody. In a half jesting tone she assured him that, so long as he did not fall into the snares of beautiful vampires, he would be safe from harm.

In the midst of this family conference, the butler burst into the drawing-room and announced the arrival of several Indian visitors. Cynthia was not too pleased with this interruption, but courtesy demanded that she should go out and enquire as to who had come round to see her father. Sir David, eager to get rid of unwelcome visitors, also rushed out of the drawing-room and on to the veranda near the main porch. He put on a beaming smile as soon as he saw Lala Munna Lal, the famous canteen contractor and his loyal secretary Chakra Babu.

Being shrewd and worldly-wise, Sir David understood at once that the loyal contractor had come over to Roshanara Road to bid farewell to the honoured guest. All the same he enquired in his anglicised Urdu as to the purpose of the visit. "Well, Lalaji, what is the meaning of this surprise visit this morning?" he said.

The Lalaji who was well wrapped up in the heaviest garments of the season proceeded a step further and spoke in ultrapolite Urdu. "Sahib, I have come to pay my homage to the highly distinguished member of the British Parliament, who, I understand on secret and reliable information, is leaving for Calcutta today."

After a few minutes the distinguished M. P. also appeared on the scene.

Chakra Babu who was followed by four servants elaborately and richly dressed for the occasion, came forward and spoke to Horatio Johnbull. "I have the honour," he began, "to present to Your Honour the humble compliments of my worthy master, and to request you to accept some fruits and Indian sweets as a farewell offering. My Master wishes me to state that these sweets are a speciality of Delhi City. We both hope and pray that your Honour would like them."

Horatio Johnbull being still ignorant of the customs of the country, turned to Sir Diehard for advice, and asked him as to whether he should accept these "farewell offerings" from a man whom he had met only twice in his life and with whom he had had no dealings to justify the exchange of gifts and presents. Sir David laughed aloud and answered: "Don't worry about western etiquette, my boy. It's customary with loyal natives to present fruits and sweets to European guests. Of course, I wouldn't advise you to eat these sweets. No Englishman can digest this rich stuff without subsequent medical treatment." Then turning round to Lala Munna Lal, he informed him that Johnbull Sahib would be pleased to accept the gifts. At this assurance, the Lalaji smiled gracefully and beckoned Chakra Babu to resume.

"My master," continued Chakra Babu, "would be honoured if your Honour would sign his 'Visitors' Book.' Sir David Diehard would bear testimony that my worthy master has served the benign Government faithfully and loyally for many years. He

admirably deserves any favours that Your Honour may be graciously pleased to confer on him. A strong recommendation from your worthy self to the Army Headquarters in England would ensure further canteen contracts for our highly respectable firm. My master's long list of testimonials would prove that the British Regiments in India under his care have prospered well in the past, and every step has been taken to add to their physical comforts. I humbly request Your Honour on behalf of my worthy master to bear all these facts in mind."

Horatio Johnbull was embarrassed at this audacious and somewhat unfair request. Once again, Sir David who knew the ways of "loyal" contractors came to his assistance. Without further discussion, he assured the Lalaji that Johnbull Sahib would certainly recommend the name of his firm to his military friends in England, and hoped that this generous recommendation would result in adding to the list of canteen contracts held by the Lalaji.

This assurance was smilingly accepted by the army contractor, gracefully acknowledged by his secretary, and grinningly applauded by the four servants who had already handed over the basket of fruits and trays of sweets to the butler for safe custody. After paying their homage and salutations to Sir David, his honoured guest, and the Miss Sahib, the party departed from the bungalow in a cheerful mood and with happy looks.

The hour of departure was drawing near, and Horatio Johnbull's English-speaking "boy" was completing the last arrangements for the long journey. Cynthia felt depressed and Horatio Johnbull also felt unusually sad at the moment of parting. Their looks betrayed their feelings. They understood each other and did not care to express themselves in words. Both had hopes buried in their breasts, and both had visions of a happy future. They would await developments and follow the course chalked out for them by some invisible and inscrutable power.



**PART THREE**  
**THE EASTERN FARRAGO**





## CHAPTER XV

### THE CALCUTTA SEASON

Although Calcutta lost her official importance as the Imperial Capital of India in 1912, she continued to retain the commercial supremacy and social glory. Despite periodic depressions, the jute industry continued to enjoy prosperity. The annual Viceregal visits, though brief, added to and enhanced the social side of each winter season. Nature also played her part in making the city merry and bright. Calcutta enjoyed delightfully warm sunshine during December and January, which made everybody feel active and cheerful. The lawns, the innumerable parks, the broad asphalt roads, the race courses, and other attractions, drew large crowds of visitors from every part of India. The city always resumed its former splendour during the brief Imperial season.

Horatio Johnbull arrived in Calcutta on the 19th of December. It was the beginning of the festive season, when the landed aristocracy of the Punjab and the United Provinces, the ruling princes of the distant south, pleasure-seekers from Western India, knighted heroes of the business world and the lingering remnants of the older ruling castes—all these and many more were to be seen in the well-known cosmopolitan haunts of Calcutta. There was cheerful activity all round. If Sir David Diehard had not taken the precaution of reserving hotel accommodation by wire, Horatio Johnbull might have had to spend a night in a waiting room at the railway station. However, as things turned out, when Horatio Johnbull emerged from his train at Howrah, he found several people waiting for him with

friendly and welcome smiles.

Sir Henry Boscombe, the world-renowned jute magnate had enjoyed the intimate friendship of Sir David Diehard for several years. He had been informed by telephone of Horatio Johnbull's visit to Calcutta. Though somewhat gouty and bulky in appearance, he was still active. His sixty years of life did not appear to have detracted much from his enthusiasm in social and sexual matters. Lady Boscombe had luckily settled down comfortably in a sea-side resort on the west coast of England, and Sir Henry was therefore free to entertain his male, and even female friends when and where he pleased. Striding rather clumsily across the platform, he went straight up to Horatio Johnbull without the least formality and shouted: "Come along, old chap, I'll give you a nice airy bed-room in my small flat in Chowringhee." He had not finished the rest of his speech before it was interrupted by another tall Englishman.

"Are you Mr. Johnbull?" he enquired in a cultured voice. "My name is Edward Stringer, of the Bengal Secretariat. I had a message from Sir David Diehard asking me to receive you and to make your stay comfortable. I've reserved a suite of rooms for you at the Grand Palace Hotel in Chowringhee."

Horatio Johnbull shook hands with the young man and thanked him. He wanted to be independent of all social calls on his time, and was not keen on accepting Sir Henry's hospitality. Stringer's timely intervention gave him an opportunity of politely refusing the old man's offer.

"Many thanks for your kind offer, Sir Henry," he said, "but I'm afraid I shall have to stick to the rooms reserved for me by our friend Stringer, at the Grand Palace."

"Please yourself, old chap," answered Sir Henry, "my car is always at your disposal. You must come and cheer up an old grass-widower as often as you can. Don't stand on ceremony. My flat is not far from your hotel."

Rai Bahadur Jamini Mohan Paul, the popular Police Deputy, had been listening to this conversation for the last few minutes. His charming smile and nonchalant manner were known to every prominent European in Calcutta. You never knew when his friendship might come in useful and it was therefore advisable to be on good terms with him.

Sir Henry Boscombe was about to go, when Rai Bahadur Paul came forward and presented himself to Horatio Johnbull. Sir Henry opened his eyes wide and shouted in his usual boisterous voice: "Hullo Jamini! Are you here to protect our distinguished friend from the terrorists?" Then turning towards Horatio Johnbull he added, "You're absolutely safe in the hands of good old Jamini. He's our famous Police Deputy, and we don't worry about bombs and rockets when he's about. Good-bye, old chap, see you again."

The Police Deputy did not show his fifty years in his face and figure. He was tall and well-built, and had refined features. He spoke English remarkably well, and had won his exceptional promotion through hard work and honesty. He had guarded several Indian Princes through troublesome times, and had looked after the personal safety of royalty and distinguished foreigners visiting Bengal. He had assisted wronged girls in tracing their seducers, and had rendered valuable service to many a wretch in trouble. He was brave and fearless but he never boasted of his heroic deeds. He respected people for their political views and did not interfere so long as they refrained from violence and breaches of the peace. During the 'non-co-operation' days, it was often his painful duty to arrest women, but he was never known to have transgressed the laws of courtesy, politeness and decency to the opposite sex. His charming manners and attractive personality had won for him popularity throughout Calcutta, so much so that there was hardly a function where old Jamini was not to be seen.

He was fond of the good things of life. Wine

and women appealed to him but although he indulged frequently, he was never accused of failing in his duty. He was gay when gaiety was demanded by a particular occasion. Even the underworld respected him, and mended their ways in response to his warning and advice.

Jamini was not surprised to see the jute magnate and the young civil servant at the platform. He knew how large was the circle of friends of his former chief, Sir David Diehard, and that he would see to the comfort and convenience of his friend during his stay in Calcutta.

"I'm at your service, Mr. Johnbull", he said in his excellent English. "Sir David has told me all about your visit to our city. My private telephone number is not given in the directory. I'll give you my code number for calls between ourselves. If at any time you want my help, please don't hesitate to ring me up. We shall probably meet fairly often at the various social gatherings which, I've no doubt, you will attend during your stay in Calcutta. I shall also make it a point to call at the hotel to see that you're comfortably settled. Au revoir, we shall meet very soon."

After the preliminary introductions were over, Horatio Johnbull, accompanied by Edward Stringer, motored down to the Grand Palace Hotel, where the Armenian reception clerk, overflowing with politeness, conducted them to the suite of rooms reserved for the British M. P.

Horatio Johnbull soon discovered that even the best hotels in Calcutta did not compare favourably with the mediocre ones in Bombay. The bedrooms were badly ventilated, the sitting-rooms clumsily and oddly furnished, and western comfort and style everywhere lacking. It appeared as if blocks after blocks had been added to the main structure which was originally designed and built for a much smaller number of guests. Inter-connecting passages had been built with open spaces which looked as if they had been turned into open amphitheatres for a travelling circus. The smoking

lounge and reception rooms were panelled with brightly painted and embossed sheets of tin, and the general scheme of decoration was neither oriental nor western, but an ugly mixture of both. Loud colours and cheap prints of hunting and boxing scenes met the eye everywhere. There was no harmony of colour or of design. The hotel looked, in fact, like a quickly-erected cinema "set."

Fortunately for Horatio Johnbull, his suite faced the open park beyond the Chowringhee highway, and there was a balcony in front separated from the sitting-room by large folding doors. From his balcony he could watch the crowds in the park opposite after the sun had gone down. He could not understand why the city was so unprovided with decent hotels for her thousands of visitors.

Although Edward Stringer belonged to the Indian Civil Service, he had not that supercilious manner which seems to be regarded as inevitable in that bureaucracy. He was just thirty and lived a lively life in a lively city. He liked Horatio Johnbull's looks, his manner of speaking, and his quiet personality. After attending to a few minor details for the comfort of the guest, he placed his company and assistance at the M. P.'s disposal. Since Horatio Johnbull said that he needed rest after a long and dusty journey, Stringer left him for the time being.

Horatio Johnbull's first impressions of Calcutta were decidedly unfavourable. He was, however, glad to see that there were splendid opportunities of making his stay instructive through the help of the friends whom he had just met. Later it seemed to him that the whole city was a great international rendezvous where people of all nationalities met and steeped themselves in the pleasures of the flesh for a brief period, and then disappeared again before the advent of the sweltering hot weather.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A HOTCHPOTCH OF HUMANITY

Within a few days of his arrival in Calcutta, Horatio Johnbull had managed to size up the hotchpotch of nations into which the city was divided. Through his contact with Europeans introduced to him by Sir Henry Boscombe and Edward Stringer, he learnt that the term "European" was indeed a misnomer. The different sets of the so-called European section were graded according to their professional activities, and there was only restricted intercourse between the various sets. As a matter of fact, there were clear lines of demarcation between Englishmen and Englishmen, Scotchmen and Scotchmen, and Englishmen and Scotchmen. Americans, Germans, Frenchmen and Italians formed their own national groups. It was a regular hotchpotch.

Broadly speaking, the people of western origin, near or remote, who called themselves Europeans, Domiciled Europeans, or Anglo-Indians, could be divided into five distinct classes. In the first place, the Britishers who belonged to the civil service and the army, regarded themselves as the real rulers of the country, and as such, had a social prestige above other Europeans. Then came the members of the various professions, such as doctors, barristers, solicitors, and accountants. The third category was that of the businessmen, including heads of the great banking concerns. These people had a financial superiority over all the other groups, and were jealous of the rights and privileges which their forerunners had created through a century of commercial effort. The fourth group and perhaps

the least important of all, in point of social standing, was the tradespeople, which included chemists, drapers and milliners, tailors and bootmakers, and managers, salesmen and assistants in department stores. Since Englishmen in India in general and Europeans in Calcutta in particular, make an unholy fuss about the difference between importing a case of corsets and stockings by ship, and selling a packet of hair-pins or a yard of elastic in a shop, the wholesale merchants looked down upon the retail trading group so much so that no member of Class IV was admitted into the Social Circle of Class III.

The position of the fifth category was almost abject, for it included such as could prove no direct heritage from any of those who came under the first four categories, Armenians, Baghdad Jews, domiciled and deeply sunburned Irishmen who boasted of relationship with the fifth grandson of an impoverished peer, descendants of the unfortunate generals of the East India Company, and other people of similar dubious type all claimed the rights and privileges of Europeans, but were invariably excluded from the inner circles of the first four groups. The Armenians and the Jews made displays of lavish hospitality, and through these, they attracted large crowds of Europeans; but the poor domiciled orphan, with his tanned complexion, and empty pockets could never gain even a footing in the higher social circles of Calcutta.

Calcutta was also a stronghold for an Anglo-Indian community, whose ancestors, in some remote period of the John Company's administration, were either encouraged or financed to marry Indian wives. The successive generations following these mixed marriages formed a distinct group which was different in accent, culture, and behaviour from the five groups of the European community. They were not only fond of, but could actually digest, hot curries, Indian condiments and sweetmeats. They varied in colour, and in culture, from mildly black to fairly white, from uncouth



ignorance to culture and refinement. In recent years, they had learnt bitter lessons and had gradually adapted themselves to the changing conditions of the country of their birth. They no longer referred to the Indians as the "natives." Indeed some of them had been glad to declare themselves as "Indian subjects." They carried on minor professional activities of chemists, druggists, veterinary surgeons, whilst their womenfolk worked as stenographers, clerks, and shop assistants, in offices, banks and shops. Generally speaking, they were poor, and as such, their womenfolk were not immune from the sexsuggestions of their European "superiors."

Through his association with Indian friends, introduced by Jamini Mohan Paul, Horatio Johnbull learnt that Indian society in Calcutta was also divided into several groups and sub-groups. There were, in the first place, landed proprietors who had personal honours and hereditary titles. Their forefathers had been favoured, at some stage in the history of India, with permanent rights over large tracts of land bearing unchangeable land revenue. History was not quite clear as to the real origin of these permanent rights. All that was clear was that the owners of these properties enjoyed princely incomes without facing the risks of business life. Fortunately for them and for those whom they controlled, they had no ruling powers. A policeman on point of duty could easily stop their cars if they flaunted about the streets in their new saloons at excessive speeds. They called their palatial mansions in Calcutta "chateaux," and entertained the members of the official colony lavishly and richly. To advertise themselves they patronised arts and crafts, and posed as the real custodians of India's artistic wealth. They were proud of their collections of rare books and musical instruments, and were always eager to exhibit these and other trophies to their Indian and European friends. They were childishly vainglorious about their earthly possessions, (including their hired mistresses).

Since their path to wealth and titles had never known either obstacles or toil, they rarely realised that their wealth represented the accumulated sufferings of their wretched tenants, who must pay their dues in kind or in cash whether the gods of rain and sunshine were generous or stingy. With few exceptions, they were reckless in their luxuries and unbearably snobbish in their outlook on life. They thought that they were far above the multitude and that other human beings were born to slave for them and their anaemic children. Such was the mental and social make-up of these landed aristocrats. They could not comprehend that even worms turn some day and that the security of their tenure was not established by some divine law.

Such was the first group of the Indian society of Calcutta.

The next category was the "bourgeoisie," which included doctors, lawyers and solicitors, as well as the Indian members of the civil service and army. The latter were, generally speaking, the children or descendants of successful professional men. Quite a large number of this category were wealthy men who had amassed fortunes by attending to the ailing bodies of rich landed proprietors and petty Rajas, or by promoting litigation between the owners and prospective heirs of large estates. The majority of these people were the true sons of India who gave generously and freely to various charities, and upheld the intellectual traditions of their race. They were the real founders of the new KULTUR which demanded a high standard of efficiency and eminence in arts and sciences. Some of them were great patriots and leaders of political thought. There was, however, a small narrow-minded sub-group amongst them which insisted upon the predominance of *Amār Desh* (i.e., Bengal) over every other part of India in cultural matters, but this section was gradually losing its hold.

Next in point of social importance was the Indian business community in Calcutta. With the exception

of a dozen, or perhaps more, Bengali families, the rest of the business community was divided into three sub-groups; the most important of which was the Marwari group. It was said that, over a hundred years ago, the Marwaris had drifted into Calcutta from all parts of Rajputana and Central India. They had come from the deserts of Bikaner and Jodhpur, from Jaipur and Jaisalmer, and from other nooks and corners of Indian states. In the beginning of their settlement in Bengal, they acted as *Banyans* or guarantee brokers to the British mercantile houses, and later, financed them in various enterprises. By means of thrifty habits, fortunate speculations, and careful banking, they made fortunes, and finally settled down in Calcutta for good. They spoke the Bengali language and dressed in Bengali style; but they preserved their identity by marrying and breeding children only within their own community. They dealt in jute, hessians, gunny bags, piece-goods, stocks and shares, and precious metals. Some of them even controlled large manufacturing establishments and acted as exporters and importers. They were utterly sectarian and peculiarly narrow-minded in religious matters. There was only one thing in which they appeared to be broad-minded and internationally inclined, and that was in sex-indulgence. The younger and the smarter set believed that, as sons of the great commercial magnates, they were fully entitled to keep foreign mistresses.

The second and the third sub-groups consisted of Punjabi contractors and Gujerati or Kathiawari merchants, who, in pursuit of wealth had also settled in Calcutta for good or for evil. But as they had not yet reached the financial status of the Marwaris, they were not regarded as "upper class" merchants amongst the Indian mercantile community. They were not in a position to influence markets, and in social and political affairs, they did not play as important a part as did the Marwaris and Bengalis.

The group which attracted Horatio Johnbull's

attention most was the fourth group, which was known all over the world (barring Russia) as the middle-classes. As usual, these classes consisted of a vast army of men employed as clerks and assistants in Government offices, in business firms, in jute mills, in shipping companies, in Indian and European banks, and in foreign consulates. They lived in perpetual dread of poverty, and in order to maintain the appearance of middle-class respectability, became easy victims of gamblers and money-lenders. Socially and politically, the middle class man was of no consequence. He was a mere hanger-on, and he could not hang on without the patronising support of "big business". During the day, he was fully occupied with the various duties usually entrusted to middle-class men, and during the night, he kept the home fires burning, in the hope that, some day, his sons would carry on the traditions of respectability. Every now and then, his small savings were carried away by "bear raids," engineered by "big business" in the local stock exchange, and he was reduced to insolvency. He had no time for arts and sciences. His efficiency in the routine of a commercial office was in itself a mark of social culture. He believed in sober living, because he could not afford the luxuries of violent living. His was a commonplace existence, and no historian ever thought of wasting energy in recording his actions and reactions. He could always be seen in his clean and well-washed clothes in the tramcars of Calcutta at nine in the morning or at six in the evening.

The population of factory workers; though very large, was not socially important. They were just beginning to organise themselves into unions and to assert their social and political rights. They had worked under poor conditions for many years, and although Bengal enjoyed the jute monopoly of the world and made tremendous profits out of it, their conditions still remained deplorably low. From day to day, they lived from hand to mouth, and worked silently and patiently in jute presses, jute spinning and weaving mills,

textile and chemical factories, and other manufacturing establishments. Whatever leisure they earned after their hard day's work or on holidays, they devoted to amusements of their own in their own groups, and did not, nor could they afford to encroach upon the social activities of the wealthy mercantile classes. Their sole anxiety was to find the ways and means of continuing their drab existence.

Horatio Johnbull was highly amused to learn from an Indian friend that the annoying fraternity of beggars and mendicants was also a distinct social group in Calcutta. In other parts of India, beggars lived on individual earnings and carried on their trade independently of any organisation. But in Calcutta, there was a regular "syndicate of beggars," financed and directed by an enterprising capitalist who had lost money in jute speculation and now regained a part of that loss in commanding an army of beggars throughout every street and corner of the great city. The beggars attacked all classes of the population and visitors with appealing, and at times, with threatening words and extracted their dues in a business-like fashion. They went home to their divisional headquarters in the evening, and were given free meals and suitable sleeping accommodation. The total earnings of the day were pooled and equally distributed, and the duties and positions of the succeeding day were allotted to each member of the fraternity by the divisional leader. It was a remarkably well paying social organisation, and the capitalist who designed it deserved his modest dividends.

The multiple social groups of Calcutta were not only interesting but also amusing to Horatio Johnbull. He realised that the fundamental characteristics of humanity were the same everywhere. Class distinctions found different expressions in different countries; but fundamentally the process of social grading depended more on money than on personal worth and courage!

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE TEMPLE OF SEXUAL GLORY

Life was full of hectic surprises throughout the Christmas week. Italian restaurants, pseudo-French cabarets, newly decorated cinemas, crowded hotel lounges, renovated theatres, and fashionable catering establishments were all bustling with activity. Even European brothels were doing a flourishing trade. Since the advent of the impressive influence of Western civilization, Calcutta had acquired an All-India fame, nay, even an international reputation, for her "frivolity." No wonder the orthodox Hindu outstripped the canny Scot in his own game, and indulged in nocturnal orgies. The Europeans of Calcutta were proud of their Indian colleagues for emulating them in their own performances!

Mercantile houses and banks had closed their doors for a whole week. Sir Henry Boscombe had finished his air mail, sea mail, and all the other mails on Wednesday evening. After a quick wash and a hurried toilet, he rushed down to the Grand Palace Hotel, where he picked up two of his most intimate friends who were awaiting his arrival in the smoking lounge. They moved into the lift, and from the lift into the corridor leading straight to the suite of rooms occupied by Horatio Johnbull.

"Good evening, old chap," shouted Sir Henry in his loud voice, "I thought I'd pay you a visit this evening. By the way, let me introduce my two pals, Harry Stephens, who is our principal jute broker, and Johnnie Johns, who is on the Stock Exchange."

Horatio Johnbull received the two newcomers

politely and wondered what this sudden visit was all about. Sir Henry could not resist hearing his own voice which he regarded as uncommonly powerful for a jute magnate. "Look hear, old boy," he bellowed, "I don't wish to nose into your secrets, but I must admit, I have been rather bored with the accounts of all these political meetings you seem to have been attending during the last three days. Believe me, when I tell you as a man of long business experience in this country, that all your sympathy with these political agitators will be wasted. They want independence. They wish to turn us out. Why? Because they think they can stop the drain of money out of their country. We *are* making money. Why? Because we've better brains and superior tactics. We've taken risks which they would never take. They are a nation of agents, brokers and imitators. They'll never invest in new and risky industrial enterprises. They want easy money, and they are making it through speculation. Some of them piled up fortunes by acting as our guarantee brokers. Why should they grumble when they've actually beaten us in the accumulation of hard cash? Your presence at their political meetings and your sympathy with those hot-headed youngsters will not do a bit of good to the good old Parliament, nor will it help British business in this country. I hope you don't mind my being damnably frank about this political stunt?"

"You're in error, Sir Henry" answered Horatio Johnbull quietly. "In the first place, I'm neither sympathetic nor antagonistic towards the political movement in this country. I'm simply trying to grasp the real meaning of the present situation. And in the second place, I've no intention of reporting my impressions or conclusions to Parliament. I fully appreciate your anxiety, and I can assure you that my harmless association with Indian politics will not undermine the position of British commerce". This, with an ironical smile.

"Sorry, old bean, do forgive me for butting in," said Sir Henry jocularly; "What I'm really driving at is that in this beastly atmosphere of politics, you're missing the lighter side of life. Why not make a night of it? We'll all trot along and have a few drinks at Ciro's, and then dine *à la bohème* at the Café Royal, where real English beef is to be had. After satisfying our thirst and appetite in the good old style, we'll trot along to *Maison Superbe* and finish the evening with a few more drinks and dances. What do you say?"

"I'm not particularly keen on going out this evening," answered Horatio Johnbull, "but since you've already made up your mind, I shall be glad to spend the evening with you and your friends."

"My dear boy," laughed Sir Henry, "what you need is recreation and amusement. You can't go on working at this pace without causing irreparable damage to your young life."

Being completely ignorant of the nature of the various places mentioned by Sir Henry Boscombe, Horatio Johnbull showed no hesitation in joining the festive trio, and after donning a blue lounge suit, placed himself at their disposal.

The cocktail bar at Ciro's was a popular rendezvous for connoisseurs of cocktails and mixed concoctions of wines and spirits. It was patronised by men and women of all nationalities, and was one of those happy places where the barriers and the distinctions of colour broke down under the exhilarating influence of alcohol. Indians and Europeans mixed freely and drank each other's health in "sunshine sally" or "evening glory," or in any of those fantastic mixtures, some of which have been imported from the U. S. A. and the Continent, and some invented locally. People forgot their business worries and political and racial differences at Ciro's, where the smiling *maitre d'hotel* always found convenient tables for distinguished patrons of Sir Henry's standing.



In the long glazed balcony adjoining the cocktail bar, the jazz band played suggestive music to a crowded house of cosmopolitan pleasure-seekers. Richly painted girls and carelessly dressed young men sat together at different tables and clapped their hands with boisterous approval when the band-master sang a popular Hawaiian tune. From their faces it appeared that they regarded love as a vehicle of sex gratification, and marriage as an unnecessary burden of civilised life. The middle-aged people, however, thought differently. For them, marriage was a symbol of respectability. They believed that every respectable citizen who could afford a wife should assume the role of a respectable husband. Of course, it was not necessary for respectable married people to bring their wives to *Ciro's* for a spot of innocent fun. Pretty typists and buxom milliners' assistants were abundantly available, and the rich businessmen of Calcutta could easily select their extra-marital companions from these choice blooms.

Sir Henry Boscombe received smiles and "glad eyes" from all directions as he entered the upper end of the glazed balcony, where a special table had been reserved for him. He looked amazingly youthful for his age. Some of his Scotch friends believed that he had taken a secret course of Voronoff's treatment, without which, they said, no man could retain his normal faculties after fifty-five in the tropical climate of Calcutta. Sir Henry, however, proved that youthfulness in later middle-age depended entirely upon youthful associations and moderation in eating and drinking.

After making himself thoroughly comfortable, he took a longish sip from his cocktail. The lively environment at *Ciro's* combined with his favourite Mexican music made him thoroughly happy. "Don't you think," he said to Horatio Johnbull, "that we were right in bringing you out of your stuffy old room at the Grand Palace? This place will certainly cheer you up. And look at all these pretty girls swinging their lovely bodies in response to this delightful music!"

"I'm glad to have come out," answered Horatio Johnbull slowly. "It seems to me that Eastern and Western races *do* mix freely in an unconventional place like this."

Sir Henry was a bit amused with the last remark. Lowering his voice to a whisper, he said: "If all those terrorists and bomb-throwers were to enjoy their evenings in the good old British way there'd be no more political agitation in this country. D'you know, laddie, I've always held that good Scotch whisky can suppress terrorism more effectively and develop a sense of companionship more quickly than anything else. I'm strongly opposed to prohibition which I regard as the most dangerous enemy of peace and goodwill. Look at those beautiful Indian girls in that corner, sipping their drinks with their lovely lips and making everybody happy and cheerful."

"They do look sweet in their beautiful saris," said Horatio Johnbull. After a moment's hesitation he added: "I'm not sure if good Scotch whisky would suppress agitation or prevent the terrorists from throwing bombs on innocent people."

"You may not agree with me on essential points," replied Sir Henry, "but I can prove to you that I've settled many a dispute over a glass of whisky and soda. Teetotallers irritate me. I get annoyed with their eternal lemon squashes. They can't enter into the spirit of friendship and they jeer at you when you feel good and happy. What d'you say, Harry?"

Harry had already consumed a couple of "golden dawns" by that time, and was in the right mood for extolling the virtues of alcohol. "I entirely agree with you, Henry old sport," he said. Then, turning his head in the direction of Horatio Johnbull, he added: "In the jute trade, Mr. Johnbull, a wee drop of old Scotch helps in putting a big deal through. Even the toughest guy falls to the charms of a good-looking woman and a glass of wine. Of course, we don't mix whisky and business every day; but there're occasions when nothing

else succeeds."

"Hear, hear!" shouted Sir Henry, "good old Harry knows the ropes."

Sir Henry Boscombe was still bubbling with laughter, when Jamini Mohan Paul, followed by his young nephew, and accompanied by a beautiful Bengali girl, appeared in the middle of the narrow passage leading to the lower end of the balcony. With his usual beaming smile, the police official presented the well-known film star, Miss Suriya Kumari, and his nephew, Bipin Bihari Paul, to Sir Henry and his friends. As they had been invited to join another party at the lower end of the balcony, Jamini Mohan apologised for not being able to accept Sir Henry's offer of hospitality.

Horatio Johnbull felt a sudden thrill as he sat down after the film star had passed along the passage. He had met beautiful and cultured Indian girls in Bombay and Delhi, but he had never seen so fascinating a picture as he met just now in the person of Suriya Kumari. There was something vastly attractive, something magnetic, about the young film star which he could not fathom, nor define for the time being. Sir Henry watched the sudden change in his expression and said: "By jove! Isn't she a ripping girl? Cheer up old man, we shall meet her again. I'm sure we shall be invited to one of her select Bohemian parties."

The dinner hour was fast approaching, and the Anglo-Spanish-Mexican band was playing the last item on the evening programme. Sir Henry and his party had finished their cocktails, and were now about to make a move to the Café Royal.

The Café Royal was one of those exclusive establishments which acquire greater fame through the quality of their cooking than through the elaborate nomenclature of their menus. For instance, a mixed grill was simply a mixture of well-grilled mutton, beef, ham, kidneys and chicken,—all of first class quality. So long as the diners enjoyed their mixed grill and knew that the various pieces of meat which constituted it,

were of excellent quality, the management found it unnecessary to give it a fancy name. Similarly, peas, potatoes, and carrots, were served as peas, potatoes and carrots without the embellishment of such expressions as "Jardinière" etc. Foreign prefixes and unpronounceable names were avoided, so that any honest Britisher, unfamiliar with the mysteries of French cooking, could order out a hearty meal without being doubtful as to its quality and contents. The Café Royal was, in short, a real paradise for those diners who believed in getting full value for their money.

Sir Henry Boscombe was a frequent patron of the establishment. His rejuvenated appetite, doubly excited by a liberal consumption of cocktails, made the selection of wholesome and palatable dishes easier and quicker. His guest of honour and his two friends were amazed at his remarkable ability in selecting the most suitable combination of courses without the least hesitation. He had acquired the habit of making quick decisions in the jute market and this habit stood him in good stead in all walks of life.

Having dismissed the head-waiter with a final nod of approval, he became suddenly serious and turned his attention to a much discussed topic of the day. "Look here, old man," he said to Horatio Johnbull, "I want your honest opinion about the present situation in Europe. The conquest of Abyssinia by Italy is an accomplished fact, and nothing on earth, not even your pious League of Nations, can alter the existing regime in that country. Spain is a perfect mad-house. The two opposing parties will go on fighting till one or the other is completely wiped out. Germany is once again fully armed for an international scuffle. Russia is making gigantic preparations behind the Bolshevik wall. And our own country has also announced an extensive naval and military programme. Now you're in good old Parliament and in touch with the officials at the Foreign Office. Can't you give us a tip about the possible results

of this mad race for armaments.

"My dear Sir Henry," answered Horatio Johnbull, equally serious, "no one is in a position to judge exactly what will happen in Europe. There are war scares everywhere, and there are astrological and literary predictions about the next world war. But no one can say definitely as to when the fires will flare up into flames. Our own Government is trying to keep out of the internal squabbles of Spain; but they cannot effectively prevent Italy or Germany or any other power, from sending men and materials. Further they are not in a position to satisfy Germany's colonial ambitions which might (who knows?) develop serious complications. Then again, there's Russia and her constant fears of German aggression in the South-East. The mid-European situation is also full of danger, and no one in London knows what turn the events in Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia will take. Personally I wouldn't take the risk of making a definite prophesy about the war. There's time enough for a big international outbreak. Anything may happen."

There was a brief pause in the discussion. Harry Stephens and Johnnie Johns were both doing full justice to the soup, and Sir Henry and Horatio Johnbull followed their example.

After a while, Sir Henry, whose mind was on the repercussions of the different money markets of the world, enquired: "What I really want to know is: has the present wave of prosperity come to stay? Is it not the direct result of the impetus given to industry by the would-be warring nations of the world? If it is, well then, the present conditions will cease to exist if there is no war in 1937 and the world will have to face an unprecedented slump once again. There'll be no demand for millions of tons of manufactured iron and steel which is being turned out specifically for a future war. There'll be a glut in the market for all those commodities which are being produced for war purposes. There'll be an international financial collapse. My own

view is that the present boom will continue for a couple of years and the gigantic preparations for war will end in a real war."

"There's always sound common sense in your views, Henry," interrupted Johnnie Johns, who was beginning to take interest in the gambling aspects of the problem. "If we could only get the information in advance, we could play hell with the Stock Exchange."

"It's not always possible to get the information in advance," said Horatio Johnbull in reply to Johnnie's wish. "The trouble about all these big wars is that only a small inner circle in each country knows the real situation. Even in advanced democratic countries, the people are not the real rulers. They're generally consulted after the event of war has actually taken place. If I were you, Mr. Johns, I wouldn't try to play hell with any stock exchange on the basis of filtered tips and adulterated gossip."

The war discussion was becoming heavier and heavier. It was already beginning to act as a damper on Sir Henry's two friends. A diversion was provided by Horatio Johnbull who related some of his amusing gambling experiences in the South of France. Dinner was proceeding steadily from course to course and the superb quality of wines was being appreciated by every member of the party.

At long last, the dinner was over, and the party sought fresh air in the open parks surrounding Chowringhee. They motored aimlessly through broad thoroughfares and chatted about all sorts of things for nearly an hour. At 11 p.m. they turned into Theatre Road, and after driving through several winding streets reached the main entrance of *Maison Superbe*, the most notorious rendezvous of Calcutta.

People who were inherently puritanical, or those who had exhausted their sex energy in early manhood, or those who were happily married and preferred the company of their wives to that of hired women, or those who were afraid of being seen in a notorious

place, were not aware of the exact location of *Maison Superbe*. Sir Henry who was youthful in temperament and daring in action, and whose wife had deliberately chosen to live in a seaside town five thousand miles away, knew not only the exact location, but also its sole proprietress and its numerous inmates. He loathed the word "brothel," which, he said, implied the existence of white slave traffic. There was no question of slavery in *Maison Superbe*. The inmates were allowed to go to the races, they were taken out by friends and temporary lovers to theatres, cinemas and even to respectable flats. They were treated generously and affectionately by men of Sir Henry's own kind; and if they accepted payment for saving respectable commercial magnates from ennui, or for satisfying the needs of sex-starved businessmen or for rejuvenating old bachelors by youthful embraces, dash it all, they deserved every penny of the money they earned in the course of their professional activities!

*Maison Superbe* was indeed different from the common brothels patronised by jack tars and lonely soldiers in port towns. Its owner, Eliza Carminetta, was a high priestess of the Temple of Sexual Glory. Having been accused of giving birth to an illegitimate child at the age of sixteen, she had been turned out of the family fold by her Anglo-Armenian parents. She drifted to Singapore, and after a prolonged apprenticeship in a local brothel, found her way into the famous international colony in Shanghai. The bitter experiences of youth hardened her soul. For a number of years, she had to deal with drunken men of all nations. She had to submit to the brutality of the highest bidder, and had to accept the foul and nauseating kisses of men who were soaking in alcohol. For twenty years, she persevered in her profession. By a stroke of good luck, she had kept her body free from disease. She had maintained her physical strength despite the heavy strain imposed upon it during years of forced dissipation. She was exceptionally lucky to have

escaped early death. The real turning-point in her life came in her thirty-sixth year when an elderly Chinaman, who had been attracted to her for seven years, left her a fairly large legacy. With a banking account of her own she hastened from Shanghai and settled down in Calcutta. Her association with businessmen in Singapore, and later in Shanghai, had given her an inside view of the mechanism of finance. Within a year after her arrival from the Far East, she completed her ambitious scheme of investment and built the famous *Maison Superbe*, the envy of every brothel keeper in the great eastern city.

The construction of *Maison Superbe*, the great Temple of Sexual Glory had involved enormous expenditure of money and brains. Architects, designers, furnishers, upholsterers, decorators, electricians, had all contributed their talents to the seductiveness of the interior perfection. There were three large drawing-rooms capable of immediate conversion into dancing halls, each of them was fitted with a large number of hidden electric lights, and each possessed the latest models of radio-gramophones. Sofas, chesterfields, and arm-chairs had been specially made to give the visitors a feeling of warmth, comfort and homeliness. The floors were covered with rich Persian carpets whilst low tables were placed in convenient places to enable the patrons to have easy access to drinks and smokes. There were two large dining-rooms beautifully furnished with modern furniture. One of these was regularly used by the inmates, and the other was reserved for distinguished patrons, who might like to entertain their guests to dinner or late supper. There were four bedrooms on each floor, and in all, there was ample accommodation for twelve inmates. If one were not aware of the real truth about *Maison Superbe*, one might easily mistake it for a select hotel.

•The members of the Temple of Sexual Glory were as varied in looks and nationality as the visitors who patronised it. From Eliza Carminetta downwards,



every one had an assumed name. The baby of the house, a tall blonde of eighteen, was supposed to be Russian. Her accent in English was so thoroughly anglicised that no one who spoke to her for ten minutes could detect even the remotest trace of Russian ancestry. It was, however, fashionable amongst smart prostitutes in Calcutta to connect their parentage with Russian exiles, and since no one ever cared to question their origin, their beauty and personal charms were universally accepted as Russian in style. Dolly and her step-sister Marie were unmistakably Belgian. They spoke French with a Belgian accent, and behaved in a warm-hearted Belgian way towards their favourite clients. Rosette, the Franco-Roumanian brunette was always restless and jerky. Although she had picked up a smattering of English, she was an ardent enthusiast of the French language, which, to her mind, was the only civilized medium of sex expression. There were three Anglo-Indian girls with refined Aryan features, who claimed distant relationship with an impoverished Colonel of the British Army and an Indian princess. The balance of the household consisted of three mulatto girls from the West Indies and two beautiful young damsels from some undefined part of the British Empire.

Eliza was aggressively proud of *Maison Superbe*, and of its excellent selection of inmates. She was a business woman, and knew the weaknesses of her rich clients. She was a dealer in human flesh, and was fully conscious of the commercial importance of supplying the best quality.

As the gorgeous saloon car drove into the porch, two neatly dressed Indian servants appeared from nowhere and rushed out to greet Sir Henry's party. They were not paid servants of the establishment. Strictly speaking, they were the honorary guards of *Maison Superbe*, who lived and thrived on the tips of rich patrons.

The whole party led by the familiar figure of the jute magnate was conducted into the most exclusive

drawing-room by a uniformed butler. Not till then, did Horatio Johnbull realise that he was a visitor to a fashionable brothel. He had visited many such houses on the Continent in his early days; but in those days, he was neither a Member of Parliament, nor a public figure of any importance. All of a sudden, he was afraid of gossip, and of the undesirable publicity which inquisitive journalists might give to his clandestine visit to a house of ill-fame. He had been under the impression that *Maison Superbe* was an ultra-modern night club, where they might spend the evening in innocent fun or indulge in harmless dancing. It was however too late to withdraw. He might as well go through the whole gamut of Sir Henry's programme of hospitality and take such risks of publicity as might face him later on.

"Hullo, El darling," said Sir Henry, as Eliza Carminetta walked into the room in a beautiful black frock and in full glory of her flourishing finances. "And how's everybody this evening? I've brought a new friend with me whom you haven't met before".

Eliza was pleased to welcome the new arrival. In her positively un-English style she greeted Horatio Johnbull with a generous smile, and said: "I am very happy to meet you. Sir Henry's bosom friends are our bosom friends. We do our very best to entertain them." Then turning around, she said to the butler: "Boy, go and ask all the Miss Sahibs to come here at once."

One by one, the girls marched into the drawing-room. Some of them were dressed in brilliantly coloured beach pyjamas, others were semidraped in muslin and chiffon. The pet of the family who was popularly known as the "Russian Baby", was dressed in a formal evening gown. She had the fixed expression of a sculptor's model on her face and was fully conscious of her glaring beauty and physical charms. Dolly, the Belgian coquette, and Rosette, the Franco-Roumanian brunette, came and sat down on each side of Horatio Johnbull. Against his wishes, the modest

bachelor was sandwiched between two hot-blooded females of the underworld. There was no escape. Sir Henry and his two friends were already amusing themselves with Marie and the mullato crowd. The radio-gramophone was turning out suggestive fox-trots one after the other, and the most exclusive drawing-room in *Maison Superbe* was humming with activity.

After half an hour or so, the butler re-entered the room and in a whisper announced the arrival of the Raja of Medipore and his party to Eliza. Excusing herself, she rushed out of the room followed by the "Russian Baby" and two Anglo-Indian girls. The Raja and his rich Marwari friends were important clients whom Eliza could not afford to offend or neglect. The second drawing-room was soon filled with guests and loud voices. Several Indian dialects were intermingled with the English language, and there was an unholy fusion between the East and the West.

The night was still young, and just before midnight, a party of Naval Officers arrived on the scene. Eliza Carminetta was doing a roaring trade. The third drawing-room was now fully occupied for the mulatto girls had joined the naval party. All the inmates of *Maison Superbe* were now engaged in the noble task of attending to the needs of a sex-starved humanity. Eliza would soon refuse admission to late comers.

Horatio Johnbull was seemingly cheerful, but inwardly disgusted with the whole business. The Franco-Roumanian brunette was almost violent in her requests for champagne and aggressive in her suggestions for retiring to her bed-room. The Belgian coquette, with one arm round his waist, was manoeuvring for kisses. The most exclusive drawing-room was getting supercharged with the nauseating smell of stale tobacco and cheap Portuguese wines. The atmosphere was unbearable. Horatio Johnbull could not stand the repeated requests for love-making of these highly-commercialised young ladies of the brothel. He wanted fresh air and a healthier atmosphere, and

so made a determined move towards the sofa where Sir Henry was still enjoying the allurements of Marie and her friends. "Let's make a move, Sir Henry," he said in a tired voice, "I'm feeling awfully sleepy."

They drove back to the Grand Palace through the boulevards of Calcutta. Sir Henry who was saturated with the joyous spirit of champagne, asked his guest: "How did you like our Temple of Sexual Glory, old boy?"

"Pretty disgusting," replied Horatio Johnbull in a sleepy voice. "I didn't know I was invited to a brothel."

The corpulent jute broker who appeared to be snoring peacefully in one corner of the saloon car, opened his eyes. "What's the bloody use of a fat bank balance?" he said lazily, "if you can't fill the gaps of married life with hired embraces. The high tension of modern business demands sexual relaxation and temporary forgetfulness. In my humble opinion, *Maison Superbe* is the *only* place where one can get both mental and physical bliss."

"Well said, Harry," shouted Sir Henry appreciatively. "Nothing like El's girls to keep you fresh and happy at my age."

They were all tired, and by three o'clock in the morning, even the visions of the half-clad girls had disappeared into oblivion.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE POLITICAL MUDDLE

The visit to *Maison Superbe* was soon forgotten in the midst of social and political engagements. The whole of Bengal was agog with the forthcoming elections to the Provincial Assembly. The local committee of the All-India National Association, though dissatisfied with the decision of the Special Convention, was organising its forces for capturing the maximum number of seats. The headquarters of the Muslim Party had also sent definite instructions to their agents to secure victory over the Muslim extremists who had a working alliance with the National Mirror. The landed proprietors were tuning their own violins to prepare for the political concert.

Most of these political groups were unfavourably inclined towards the provisions of the New Constitution, and wanted something better—God alone knew what? But all the same, they were already sending appeals to their constituents, and were creating the right atmosphere for their subsequent speeches. They all felt that the remedy prescribed by the New Constitution for the political and social ailments of India was neither effective nor curative, but being themselves sickly, they could not override the decisions of the foreign physicians. Each community and each group was now battling for its own existence and no one cared what happened to the political health of India as a whole.

Horatio Johnbull had splendid opportunities of studying the situation at close quarters. Edward Stringer had introduced him to some members of the

Calcutta Corporation, who ran the city, and frequently indulged in communal squabbles and wrangles. So long as they could hear their own mighty voices, they did not care a tinker's damn as to what happened to the drainage and water supply schemes of their beloved city. They were utterly unmindful of speed and expedition in matters relating to the welfare of the town entrusted to their care ; but they were eagerly mindful of their own communal rights in the corporate body.

Commerce and industry were better organised on both sides. Being fabulously rich, the Indian commercial magnates were in a position to dictate their terms in their own national chamber of commerce. Their victory was assured and they were looking forward with jubilant faces to the First of April, when they would be entitled to occupy seats of honour in the Legislative Assembly of Bengal, and would be in a legislative position to protect Big Business. Small business could, of course, look after itself. They could not waste their energy and breath in protecting the cottage workers of Bengal. They were out to secure positions of monopoly in cement, iron and steel, sugar and jute.

The position of European commerce was also exceptionally strong. In the first place, by a device of restriction on production and working hours, the managing agents of jute mills had managed to keep the industry prosperous, unlike other manufacturers of textile products. Whatever the state of depression in other markets, jute continued to pay dividends. And in the second place, the rights and privileges of European commerce were fully safeguarded in the New Constitution against any discriminatory policy that a future Government might choose to adopt.

The leaders of the European group with the backing of Sir Henry Boscombe and his Bohemian gang of stock brokers and jute merchants, advocated a firm and unyielding Government policy. As a matter of fact, some of them openly desired the suspension of the New

Constitution, as it was only in this way that they could prove the inability of Indians to manage their own internal affairs. They were assured of ample representation in the provincial assembly, and were financially powerful enough to face any political situation. Democracy, as devised by the framers of the New Act, was, according to them, unsuited to Indian conditions. They not only opposed, but intensely disliked the influence of the "intellectuals" on the masses. They were the friends, supporters and admirers of Maharajas, Nawabs, and rich landed proprietors, from whom they derived large incomes every year. It was really stupid on the part of the British Parliament, they said, to have sanctioned a new scheme of constitution which involved a highly complicated democratic machinery of elections for the masses. How could the poor illiterate millions of India understand democracy and all its zig-zag paths? They should be protected against a handful of educated and bookish politicians. European commerce must organise itself to save the masses from the hands of these demons. They were now organising themselves and had already made up their minds to send their ablest leaders to the Provincial Assembly, to protect their financial stakes in Bengal.

In the course of his discussions with the representatives of the various interests, Horatio Johnbull discovered that every group was uncompromising in its attitude towards the other groups. There was a complete political confusion in the city, and no one was able to find a solution acceptable to the majority of political groups. A disinterested student of politics would have to move in the wilderness for a considerable time before finding any real objective.

In addition to the major politico-religious and racial groups such as the Hindus, the Muslims and the Europeans, special seats had also been reserved under the New Act for Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, landholders, representatives of labour and women. It was almost impossible to distinguish between the political

denominations of these reserved allocations, for the simple reason that no one was trying to work for the development of an All-India democracy on recognised political lines. There was such a confusion of ideas and professional interests, that Horatio Johnbull gave up the attempt as hopeless.

Jamini Mohan Paul had been very helpful in arranging meetings with prominent members of the National Mirror, whom he had known intimately for years. Sir Henry Boscombe was no less enthusiastic in introducing Horatio Johnbull to the spokesmen of the European community and in impressing upon his mind the urgent necessity of strengthening the hands of the Provincial Governors. He took him round to the princely houses of the uncrowned Rajas and rich landed proprietors, and introduced him to the President of a recently formed association for the protection of "Our Stakes." He initiated him into the mysteries of the jute market and gave him timely information of the forthcoming boom in stocks and shares. "I say, old chap," he said one day, "why don't you chuck up your good old politics and make a million or two out of the steel market. There's going to be a big rise in iron one of these days. I'm on the spot and I shall help you in picking up easy money." But Horatio Johnbull paid no heed to this "certainty," and carried on his investigations regardless of the money-making possibilities of jute or iron or steel.

As Sir Henry had foretold, Horatio Johnbull received an invitation from Suriya Kumari, the film star, to join a tea-cum-cocktail party at her flat in Chowringhee on Wednesday, the 30th of December. It was a personal invitation, written in her own delightful style, and requested his presence at a social gathering of artists, musicians, literary men and scientists. She was particularly anxious to meet him again, and hoped that he would not disappoint her by accepting another invitation for the same evening.

In the thick of political conflicts and commercial



upheavals, Horatio Johnbull welcomed the opportunity of spending a pleasant evening with a fascinating and talented Indian film star. He accepted the invitation with a thousand thanks.

## CHAPTER XIX

### FILM STAR AT HOME

Suriya Kumari was a daring daughter of Bengal. Her prolonged stay in England during the formative period of childhood was responsible for an adventurous and ambitious spirit. Even in her early teens, her soul yearned for the free expression of her innermost thoughts in beautiful forms. She was a born artist. In spite of the restraint imposed upon her by her aristocratic father, during her occasional visits to her mother-country, she continued to develop her artistic tendencies in painting and music. At sixteen, she could sketch and paint in water colours remarkably well, and could also reproduce any romantic piece of Western music with accuracy. She wanted to train herself for an artistic career; but her father forced upon her a distasteful engagement to a young student in London, whose only qualification was that he belonged to a highly respectable Hindu family. The feeble-minded young student had no personality, no ambition, and after three years of this one-sided contract, Suriya Kumari broke her engagement in a manner which was frank enough for herself, but unforgivably candid for the student and his highly respectable family.

The unsavoury episode of the broken engagement was soon forgotten by all concerned, as the young student with British qualifications was able to find a respectably suitable bride in a wealthy Bengali family within three months after his return to India. At nineteen, Suriya Kumari was again free to pursue her career in her own way. But the goddess of arts was definitely against her ambitions at that time. She

became indeed the centre of attraction for middle-aged Majors, young civilians, and promising barristers in Delhi, where she was spending a winter with her parents. Proposals of marriage poured in, and anxious admirers bombarded her with their importunate requests. To escape from this embarrassment of unwanted lovers, she left for Europe once again to chalk out an independent career for herself.

It was after her father's sudden death, when she was over twenty, that she decided to discard orthodox conventions and to enter the field of motion pictures. There were difficulties, as usual, before her to surmount; but in the end, a middle-aged director was so charmed with her Eastern beauty and natural poise that he engaged her for a brief contract in a film of oriental setting. Her first triumph led to several others, and within a period of five years she became a popular film star. From London to Paris, and thence to Berlin, she finally drifted to Calcutta, where gigantic film corporations were engaged in turning out talkies for the overseas markets. She became a free-lance actress, and at the early age of twenty-five dictated her own terms for film contracts. The Aryan Theatres Ltd. and the Bharat Movietone Company were always anxious to have her in their films. Film fans were crazy about her acting, and all her productions drew crowded houses all over India.

Her Hindi was as sweet and melodious as her English. She had all the advantages of both Eastern and Western culture. In some respects, she became a national heroine, and in this capacity she succeeded in conquering the prejudices of Hindu society against the adoption by the daughters of Brahma of a film career. Having achieved financial independence and mass popularity, she made the fullest possible use of her physical beauty and subtle charm in creating for herself a circle of intellectual and artistic friends, who paid her homage on all occasions.

She was of medium height with a well-proportioned

slim figure. Her rich olive complexion was softened by careful and methodical touches of face powders and creams, and her voluptuous mouth was adorned with delicately rouged lips which seemed to radiate a warm glow under the influence of passion. Her long tapering fingers and painted nails added charm to her beautiful pale hands. The delicate perfume of her raven hair produced a peculiarly seductive effect on all those who came near her. Her jet black eyes shone with passion. She was an ardent votary at the shrine of Kama. She believed in physical love, that intense sexual love which brings both restlessness and passivity. She could scorch the senses of her lovers, and yet give them moments of mental calm. She could pour her whole personality into her love-making without causing harm to herself or to her lover. Her intense sexual craving and curiosity forever sought fresh avenues of gratification; but unlike the professional vampire, she never forgot the favours she had accorded to past admirers.

Suriya had a comfortably large flat in one of those palatial structures which adorn the most fashionable part of Chowringhee. It was furnished almost entirely in the Western style. The only exception was the square drawing-room in which she gave her frequent tea-cum-cocktail parties, and which looked something like the spacious reception room of an Eastern princess. Low divans were conveniently placed all over the room, and imitation Turkish tables and ottomans were scattered near the huge cushioned dais which the film star herself occupied at social gatherings and soirees. There were no dazzling lights in the drawing-room, or in any other part of the flat. The colour scheme of the curtains and upholstery was subdued and soothing to the eye. The general atmosphere was one of Eastern ease and comfort.

In the eyes of Indian society, Suriya Kumari had performed a miracle in raising the status of an actress from that of a social pariah to that of a respected exponent of national art, from an unknown concubine

of a rich merchant to an esteemed reformer of social evils. The generously critical members of society were always anxious to add to her fame and popularity by showering their praise and admiration upon her genial personality and by crowding to her frequent parties. European critics, Indian journalists, young artists and musicians, professors, psychologists and mathematicians, fashionable ladies of the town, wives of barristers and solicitors, old dames with Lesbian tendencies, all gathered in her flat from time to time to pay homage to her womanhood and her living art. Like a great Parisian lady, she had succeeded in creating a new salon of culture and refinement.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, the 30th of December, Horatio Johnbull was announced in the salon of the great actress, by a liveried servant whose turban bore the initials "S.K." and who, in true oriental fashion bowed to the distinguished guest of the evening, and then withdrew from the crowded room. Suriya Kumari rose from the dais, and in strict accordance with the custom prevailing in Calcutta, walked around the room with her guest and introduced him to everybody in turn.

Sir Henry Boscombe who never missed an opportunity of kissing a beautiful woman's hands in the continental style, had already arrived. Jamini Mohan Paul was also there, chatting jovially with a charming young lady, the wife of a well-known geologist whose scientific theories and discoveries had created a stir all over India. Bipin Bihari, the young artist was going round from room to room in search of sweets and pastries lavishly provided by the hostess for her guests. Nandu Sinha, the painter, was seriously engaged in arranging tea cups and saucers. Biren Ghosh, the musical prodigy was busy tuning the piano. Nirmal Mukerjee, the retired Professor of Mathematics, was sitting restlessly on the edge of the divan, admiring the geometry of Suriya's graceful figure and paying mental homage to her charms in terms of angles and gradients.

In one corner of the room, the middle-aged geologist, Dr. Satish Bannerji, was explaining the organic nature of minerals and the sexual upheavals of rocks to a grey-haired Parsi lady who was rich enough to patronise scientists and their apparently untenable theories. The great geologist was making desperate efforts in non-scientific language to convince the old lady that a particular type of earthquake was due indirectly to the presence of invisible sex affinities in rocks.

Dr. Mitrosky, the great Polish psychologist, was talking slowly and deliberately to Nritya, the young Bengali dancer, about the absurdity of superiority and inferiority complexes. He was on a lecture tour in India, and was very much in love with the culture and traditions of the ancient Brahmins who, he declared, were the earliest exponents of the principles of psychology. In a clear speech accompanied by a restless gesture of the right hand and right shoulder, he was trying to prove to the fair dancer that if the theories of Freud, Jung and Adler were to be accepted as scientific truths, ninety-nine per cent of human beings would be proved to be abnormal. He refused to believe that the source of all human striving was "sex," or the "will to power." He held that the chief "complex" of all human beings was the "continuity complex," or the desire to continue life in accordance with the psychological patterns and associations assimilated by the subconscious mind in childhood and in other stages of life. According to him, the struggle for the continuity of life was a much more important factor than "sex" in the development of individual and national characteristics.

Sir Henry Boscombe was reclining luxuriously on a divan, talking almost affectionately to a young Bengali "charmeuse" who had deserted her husband and her infant son in favour of the stage. She was listening eagerly to the various topics of social interest which he was expounding with exceptional zeal and intelligence.

The hostess herself was engaged in a sweet tête-à-

tête with her guest of honour. Being a creature of rapid responses, she was almost devouring the compliments which Horatio Johnbull was paying to the catholicity of her tastes.

From general remarks, Horatio Johnbull drifted to the more particular. "You have a beautiful home, Miss Kumari," he said softly "I've never seen anything so delightfully oriental in comfort and style."

"Please don't call me 'Miss Kumari'". requested Suriya in her slow seductive voice. "It's so unfriendly and formal. My real name is Suriya, and I'm supposed to be a daughter of the Sun, the central source of heat and energy. I shall be happier if you'd call me Suriya."

"It's very sweet of you to grant me the privilege of calling you by your first name," answered Horatio Johnbull. "I'm glad to meet your friends. They appear to be a clever lot of men and women versed in the sciences and arts. Look at young Bipin! He seems so devoted to you. He is a fascinating young man, and I should like to know more of him."

Suriya Kumari always treated Bipin Bihari as a baby lover. She was pleasantly amused with Horatio Johnbull's remark. "Bipin," she said, "is a darling boy, full of dreams and hopes, but a bit over-zealous in the art of hero-worship. Personally I like strong silent men who make us feel that we are mere slave-girls in their presence."

Horatio Johnbull was already in love with the soft melody of Suriya's voice. He was now thrilled with this expression of her admiration for strong silent men.

"I didn't know," he said, "that the cave man was also popular in India. In Europe, the last decade has brought about a peculiar masculinisation of young girls; with the result that baby lovers are again in favour. I think there's nothing so sweet as the soft subtle charm of a woman who doesn't ape mannish behaviour. After all, a beautiful woman is meant to be loved by a hundred per cent he-man."

Suriya was stirred with the fever of her own youthful

enthusiasm. She was determined to break down the resistance of a mere male of early middle age by all the sex devices and allurements known to her nature. "But tell me, Mr...Horatio Johnbull," she enquired in a hesitating and halting tone, "how many men are really capable of that intense physical love which gives a woman perfect mental calm?"

"It's a very difficult question to answer, my dear young lady," replied Horatio Johnbull. "Generally speaking, I should say that the average man is a bundle of nerves, a product of the high pressure of modern civilisation, in which he lives under constant strain. He's incapable of the love you speak of. In him, sex is like any other form of appetite which rouses him into activity when he's hungry at given intervals. As soon as his lust is crudely satisfied, he's free from the necessity of love-making till the next occasion."

"I'm glad to know," observed Suriya, "that you hold views similar to mine on this important subject. We women are taught from early childhood to worship our husbands. Since the husband possesses certain religious rights over the body of his wife, she is compelled to pander to his irregular and vulgar sexual desires. Amongst the Roman Catholics, the husband feels justified in appealing to the parish priest if the wife ceases to love him, or refuses to accede to his brutal wishes. In England and other Western countries, the same thing happens if the married woman is dependent upon her husband for the bare necessities of life. There is no desire, nor anxiety, on the part of a husband to study the emotional requirements of his wife. A woman's highest ideals are smashed to pieces under the constant hammering of a brutal husband's vulgar demands. The result is unhappiness and mental suffering. I simply loathe the idea of married life of this kind."

"In the absence of a better system," remarked Horatio Johnbull, "I'm afraid we shall have to get on as best as we can with the old. All the same, I agree



with you that a great deal of sin and misery could be prevented if society understood the varying demands of different human beings, and adopted an attitude of tolerance and sympathy towards those who did not, or could not, by inherent nature comply with the customary moral codes."

"This is exactly what I have been looking for, ever since I understood the true meaning of sex life. Sympathy and understanding? These two simple words are so difficult to understand. Your own parents, your own intimate friends refuse to understand you. Do something unconventional or something which your very soul yearns for, and you are condemned as an immoral person. My dear Horatio Johnbull, you must come and dine with me to-morrow. We shall be all alone, and then I shall tell you something about my own reactions."

Horatio Johnbull's heart was softened by Suriya's sincerity. Although he was in love with Cynthia Diehard, he was not immune from the wiles of a beautiful Indian girl who possessed a warm Eastern heart and a sober Western culture. He welcomed the opportunity of spending an evening with her, and accepted the invitation with all its possibilities.

Sir Henry Boscombe was becoming desperately impatient. He wanted to be near the famous film star and breathe the sweet fragrance of her delightfully desirable body. He could not stand the suspense any longer. He moved towards the dais, and said: "With your permission, little lady, I should like our friend to have a brainy talk with Dr. Satish Bannerji." Turning towards Horatio Johnbull, he added: "Come along, old boy, meet our famous geologist who would like to tell you all about the lateral thrusts of rocks, and their sexual upheavals."

As soon as Horatio Johnbull moved away to the corner where the famous geologist had established himself for the evening, Sir Henry occupied his seat next to Suriya Kumari. "Jamini always says that

you're a wicked old man, Sir Henry," she said smilingly, "and I agree with him this time. Why did you spoil our little chat?"

"In the first place," Sir Henry answered, "Jamini is a little liar. He's jealous of my popularity with charming young girls like you. And in the second place, dear little Suriya, I was simply longing for a chat with you. I'm not as young as our friend Horatio, but I have a more youthful heart."

"My dear Sir Henry," said Suriya, with a cunning smile on her face, "I like strong silent men. You are so effusive in your love-making that one suspects your sincerity and seriousness."

In the meantime, Horatio Johnbull had settled himself in a low chair next to Dr. Satish Bannerji. The latter had, by this time, exhausted his theory of sex reactions in rocks on the grey-haired Parsi lady, and was in a mood to change the conversation. "What do you think of our scientific developments, Mr. Johnbull?" he enquired in a casual way.

"England is proud of India's achievements in the world of science," answered Horatio Johnbull. "Look at the tributes paid to the Indian plant physiologist who demonstrated the nervous reactions of acacias and other types of trees. Both pure and applied sciences are making tremendous headway in your country, and I'm sure that within the next twenty years there'll be a galaxy of Indian scientists of international reputation."

"I appreciate the sincerity of your remarks," said the famous geologist, "but I'm afraid I can't agree with your predictions about the future. We scientists are the most poorly paid people in the whole country. The capitalist who piles up a huge fortune in speculation, draws upon the resources of science and makes millions out of the results of research. But when it comes to sharing his fortune with those who have enabled him to amass it, he becomes mean and niggardly. He says that but for his business acumen and enterprise, the discoveries of science would never have

yielded financial results. He allows the scientist a bare living wage, and the scientist loses all his enthusiasm and motive power. There are brilliant men of science in this country who are actually starving. If this goes on for another ten years, Indian scientists will cease to produce creative work. They will probably drift to better paid jobs, and the country as a whole will suffer in the long run."

"But why don't you form an organisation of scientific workers?" asked Horatio Johnbull, "as they have done in some parts of Europe. Make it compulsory for every scientist to sell his patent rights and discoveries through the central union. Fix a minimum salary for scientific workers and technologists, and don't let any capitalist exploit your members for personal advantage. Make the factory owners and industrialists share the fruits of scientific research and technical experience with those who enable them to earn large dividends. Make a determined move in this direction and you'll find that your people will have all the respect that a scientist richly deserves for his work and self-sacrifice."

"This is a splendid idea Mr. Johnbull," said Dr. Bannerji, "and I thank you heartily for having suggested it. I shall talk the matter over with some of my colleagues and see if they are prepared to make some sort of beginning."

The sun was no longer shedding its golden rays into the curtained drawing-room. The evening was getting darker and darker. The subdued light of small electric torches in the salon was just sufficient to give the guests a feeling of visibility. Bipin Bihari, assisted by the butler, was moving from divan to divan, and from chair to chair, handing over delicious cocktails to the guests. Conversation was gradually becoming more and more hilarious. There was an atmosphere of cultured gaiety amongst the members of the tea-cum-cocktail party. Topics of social and sexual interest were being freely and frankly discussed by both the sexes. Everyone felt at ease and was talking

spontaneously and without restraint.

And then there was the usual reaction. Everybody suddenly felt tired. They wanted to get away from the fragrant atmosphere of the eastern drawing-room to the fresh and bracing air of the evening. One by one, they thanked the hostess for a very enjoyable evening, and one by one, they said good-bye to her and to each other. The lovely hand of Suriya Kumari rested on the slender shoulders of Bipin Bihari, the baby lover, and all was quiet and calm, at least for one evening.

## CHAPTER XX

### SOME MODERN PICTURES AND SOME ANCIENT DANCES

The private dinner *à deux* at Suriya's flat was a memorable event for both the diners. The passive resistance of early middle age soon vanished before the subtle and delicate assault of matured youth. First impressions of mutual liking became convictions, and a bond of friendship was sealed between the Eastern film star and the Western politician.

Three hours passed like three moments in the delicious throng of sensations, and in the sweet exchange of confidences. At ten they left for Ciro's where a mixed gathering was being entertained by Sir Henry Boscombe to usher in the New Year. The orchestra played the Auld Lang Syne at midnight, and men and women knitted their hands together in a huge circular chain. Regardless of caste or colour, irrespective of party differences and communal hatreds, they wished each other a Happy New Year, and joined in the chorus of the old Scotch song. The harmony of music and motion, and the camaraderie of wine and whisky continued till 4 a. m. when the revelries of Calcutta ceased for another day, and the ex-Imperial capital of India saw the dawn of another year of strife and relaxation, of disappointments and hopes, of failures and achievements.

On Saturday, the 2nd of January 1937, at 10 a. m., Bipin Bihari Paul, the young artist, marched into Horatio Johnbull's sitting-room at the Grand Palace, accompanied by another friend named Motilal Chaudry. Bipin had already ascertained on the telephone that

Horatio Johnbull was free to pay a visit to the Art Gallery that morning. In his eagerness to boast the modern school of painting in Bengal, Bipin had persuaded Motilal to lend him moral support. Motilal was a handsome young member of the "smart set" of the landed gentry. After graduating from one of the local colleges he had taken to poetry as a means of self-expression. Being an amateur poet, he now no longer suffered from the boredom of perpetual leisure. He was anxious this morning to explain the renaissance of Indian Painting in a poetic and grandiose style to Horatio Johnbull.

"Good morning, Mr. Johnbull," said Bipin Bihari, as he entered the room with his friend. "I have brought my pal, Motilal Chaudry with me. He is a poet by choice, and an art critic by heritage. He was very keen on meeting you, and I thought this was the best opportunity of introducing him to you."

"Very pleased to meet you, Motilal," said Horatio Johnbull in an affable manner. "Let's begin the New Year by praising works of art. Beauty in any form is always stimulating. I'm ready if you boys wish to make a quick move."

During the brief journey to the Art Gallery, both Bipin Bihari and Motilal talked a great deal about "modernity" in Indian art, with a view to bringing Horatio Johnbull to the proper state of "receptivity." They appeared to be perfectly serious about the new methods in painting romantic and mythological subjects, and talked much of cubism and futurism. Horatio Johnbull listened to the vehement expressions of opinion in silence.

The Art Gallery was in reality a temporarily leased wing of a Modern museum. In the months of December and January, when foreign and distant Indian visitors are most conspicuous by their rushing presence in Calcutta, a spacious hall in the central museum is set aside for Indian paintings of all known and unknown schools. In the beginning of 1937, the so-called modern

school had gathered considerable strength, and the patrons of art, being anxious to follow the fashions of the day, pretended to prefer "modern creations" to the products of the old Bengal school.

In spite of the enthusiasm displayed by Bipin Bihari and Motilal, Horatio Johnbull was not pleased with his visit as he passed through the Art Gallery. There was a sense of uneasiness and a feeling of restlessness. The various pictures painted by popular artists and hung on the panelled walls failed to make a harmonious impression on the eye. They were not at all representative of the various Indian schools, or even of the Mughal school which had been followed in the north with an almost religious zeal. He was shocked at the hideous display of pattern and form, which, to his untrained eyes appeared like a mechanised puzzle in horrors.

As they walked slowly from corner to corner, Motilal explained the intricacies of drawing and technique, and Bipin Bihari extolled the colour schemes in different pictures. But Horatio Johnbull could not make up his mind to fall in with their views. He saw pictures depicting Mongolian eyes in an Aryan nude, and Chinese feet in an Egyptian dancer. There were other paintings in which the beauty of form was completely marred by the excessive size of the hands and feet. There was nothing definitely oriental about most of the drawing and sketches exhibited in the Gallery. The figure of a female bather standing in the shallow waters of a stream at eventide was represented by a blurred landscape, a few angular strokes of the brush, and scattered dabs of colour. Purely Eastern impulses were depicted in a semi-Western style. Even mythological scenes were re-created on the canvas with a brutal lack of historical and anatomical detail.

Horatio Johnbull was asked by his two friends to close his eyes and imagine the rest. He could, of course, close his eyes, but he could not imagine the rest. In his younger days, he had been taught to regard art as

a means to the realisation of beauty; and this teaching held him so firmly that he expected everything artistic to be beautiful. Moreover, he had seen beautiful specimens of Indian art in London and Paris and could not reconcile the fact that, in the very midst of a national art gallery in Calcutta, he was asked to accept ugliness as a glorified symbol of Indian artistic achievement. As a measure of consolation he thought that this new form of modern art had been encouraged in India by some morbid foreign art critic. India was dangerously susceptible to feigned praises by anyone who bore a "vitch" or "sky" at the tail-end of his name. The "sensitively" prepared visit to the Art Gallery ended at midday. Bipin was delighted at Horatio Johnbull's silent assent to every remark made by him. In his childish simplicity, he was sure that the latter had really enjoyed his inspection of the pictures of the modern school. The two enthusiasts of futurism, or whatever it was called, were thoroughly satisfied with what they considered as the vindication of "modernity."

In the evening, Horatio Johnbull was again, more or less by force taken into a popular music hall by Bipin Bihari and Motilal, who wanted him to witness a performance of classical Indian dancing, and listen to modernised Indian music. He had heard in Bombay and Delhi that, orthodox antagonism to dancing had almost disappeared in India. Married women were taking to folk dancing to set an example to their young daughters, and even professional dancing was beginning to acquire a new dignity. In musical soirées and birthday parties, group dancing was regarded as an essential sign of popularity and social culture. Classical dancing was no longer the monopoly of hereditary and professional entertainers, who were engaged in olden days for the amusement of marriage parties and so on. Dancing had become of great merit socially and the sons and daughters of the upper classes were acquiring proficiency in this art both for their own personal satisfaction and for the resultant social prestige.



It is common in India to call music-halls by the dignified name of "Gaiety Theatres," irrespective of the effect the performance might produce on the audience which might indeed be the reverse of gay. The music-hall visited by Horatio Johnbull and his two companions was also known as the Gaiety Theatre. It was unduly gilded and loudly decorated, and the colour scheme was shabbily over-accentuated. The seats were none too comfortable considering the size of the admission fee charged by the management. This hall had, however, suddenly acquired fame and popularity by the arrival of the International Hectic Review Company. Obviously the Russian ballet had produced some gaiety in the minds of the theatre-going public. After the excessive strain of Christmas performances, the Company had decided to observe two holidays, and its place had been taken by the Indian Dancing Troupe.

The artists, both male and female, of the Indian Dancing Troupe had played to crowded houses in Europe and America, and had already won international praise for their vivid artistic talents. They were uncommonly punctual in their appearance. Although the house was packed to its full capacity, Bipin Bihari had secured convenient seats through the influence of his uncle, Jamini Mohan Paul, who had also agreed to join the party. In the midst of the roaring noise of the haphazardly enlarged orchestra, the performance began in an atmosphere of expectancy and curiosity.

Horatio Johnbull's ignorance of the technique of Indian music and dancing did not stand in the way of his appreciation of the graceful form and harmony expressed by the first three items on the programme. Danced to the accompaniment of well-known Indian *Raginis*, these dances produced a perfect harmony between music and motion. Anyone familiar with the love life of a village girl in Northern India, or with the playful activities of young people during the Holi festival, could easily find an expression of the original sentiment and behaviour in the graceful movements of

the dancers on the stage. It was the outflow of charm from the dancers to the audience which formed a living link between art and life. A feeling of soothing restfulness was produced by the poetry of motion. The supple movements and stimulating gestures of the artists were applauded by the audience, and there was a continued uproar of encores.

And then came the ultra-classical item of the programme; a dance imported from some remote corner of South India, and known amongst the connoisseurs as *Kathakali*. People had seen blazing accounts of the revival of this wonderful art in the local newspapers, and were therefore anxious to witness with their own eyes the spectacular effect it had created on intelligent Indian and European critics.

Horatio Johnbull was bitterly disappointed in his expectations when the exponent of this ancient art appeared on the stage. With a stretch of imagination he could understand the nature of the primitive man who feared neither lust nor modesty; but he could not understand the mentality of an audience of civilised men and women feasting their eyes on a scene of ill-clad ugliness. The male dancer who had been advertised as one of the foremost artists of his age, made hideous gestures with his eyes and mouth, and angular movements with his protruding knees. Even the ancients would have smiled with derision at his multi-coloured face and pagoda-like head-dress. With his elbows and outstretched thumbs he traced some weird figures in the air, and with his shaking feet and toes he made some puzzling patterns on the floor. His hips and legs moved to and fro in a meaningless swing and his whole body produced jerky movements which represented neither good gymnastics nor good dancing.

Jamini Mohan Paul who was sitting on the left could easily see that Horatio Johnbull was disgusted with the revival of the ancient art. "Don't look horror-stricken, old man," he said jocularly, "this's only a weird interpretation of mythology and has

nothing to do with real life."

Horatio Johnbull was trying his utmost to suppress his distaste. "I thought as much," he said in reply.

Fortunately for the audience, the scenery was soon changed and the stage was turned into a rural scene of beautiful simplicity. The orchestra struck off notes, and the artists presented a rural dance with remarkable agility and grace. The remaining items on the programme were truly artistic and depicted in the form of a pantomime the various aspects of village life in India. In the end, Indian dancing justified itself and the audience left the Gaiety Theatre with a sense of admiration, and the satisfaction of having seen a good show.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE GARDEN HOUSE AND ITS MISTRESS

In private life, Jamini Mohan Paul was an ardent admirer of women and an inveterate gourmand. His official life, as an eminent police officer, brought him into frequent touch with Western life and Western manners, but his inner self always longed for an evening in Eastern surroundings. His craving for oriental food made him accept occasional invitations from landlords and petty chiefs who owned "garden houses" and secluded cottages on the riverside.

The Raja of Medipore, who was everlastingly in search of purchased popularity and titles, requested Jamini Mohan Paul to convey his "humble invitation" to the distinguished member of the British Parliament who was honouring Calcutta with his presence. Jamini at once relished the idea of this invitation, and with his usual affability communicated the message to Horatio Johnbull. The latter, being unaccustomed to Indian diet, was not very keen on accepting but lest his refusal should injure the sensitive feelings of the Raja Sahib, he agreed to join a private supper party on Wednesday, the 6th of January.

As a matter of social diplomacy, the Raja also invited Edward Stringer of the Bengal Secretariat, and Sir Henry Boscombe, his co-worshipper at the Temple of Sexual Glory. At the duly appointed time, Jamini Mohan collected the three European guests from their respective homes, and ordered the chauffeur to drive towards the riverside. After passing through the main thoroughfares, the aristocratic saloon car sped along a lonely road and finally reached a small by-lane leading

to the garden house of the Raja of Medipore.

The guests were received by the Raja himself at the main entrance to the house in an inimitably courteous manner. In the hall stood a short figure which could be seen more by the bright yellow turban than by its height or personality. This was the figure of Rai Bahadur Seth Bansi Mall, a prominent Marwari millionaire who made advances of ready cash to the Raja Sahib, if and when the latter's resources were exhausted through continuous drain in the Temple of Sexual Glory. The Rai Bahadur was always amenable to financial reason and charged a moderate rate of ten per cent on his advances against the security of some of the most valuable emeralds and pearls belonging to the Raja. He was affectionately inclined towards the landed proprietor and also loved the sexual joys of life, which he could always obtain through the good offices of the Raja of Medipore.

"Allow me to introduce Seth Bansi Mall," the Raja said, as he presented the millionaire to his guests. "He is not only a generous friend, but also an agreeable companion in my hours of relaxation."

"Since your hours of relaxation are eternally long, the Rai Bahadur must be a constant companion," remarked Jamini Mohan who knew the ins and outs of the private life of the Marwari magnate.

From the hall the Raja conducted his guests into the spacious drawing-room which was tastefully and elegantly furnished after the Western style. In the centre of the room stood a beautiful young girl of medium height, fair complexion and unornamented charm. She was dressed in a pale-blue sari and had pale-blue sandals on her dainty feet. She wore only two thin gold bangles on each of her wrists and a small diamond pendant on her neck. She was neither bold nor shy in her behaviour, and was not embarrassed by the visit of the three foreigners whom she had never met in her young life. She was obviously accustomed to the Western ways of greeting strangers. The Raja

introduced his guests to the charming young lady, and she received them in a graceful manner, and requested them to make themselves comfortable.

In the beginning, there was an awkward silence. Sir Henry made an attempt to infuse spirit into the company, but since there was only one lady present, he failed to make his conversation sufficiently amusing. After some time, a Bhutia butler served martinis and other apéritifs. Gradually the party became jovial and less ceremonious. In his refined Hindustani, the Marwari millionaire told them tales of the hills and jokes of bygone days. In his unequally refined English, the Raja translated the jokes and no one could help laughing. Even the charming young lady joined in the merriment.

The dining-room was in reality a large rectangular hall. Ordinarily the floor was covered with bright Eastern carpets and hand-printed calicoes. There was always a profusion of cushions and pillows for Indian visitors and Indian meals. But on this particular occasion, a small round table had been methodically laid for seven diners. The Bhutia butler, who was conversant with the art of table service, had arranged the choicest flowers of the garden house on the table and provided all the accessories of a Western meal.

The place of honour was, of course, occupied by the charming young lady whose unofficial name was Hamida. The guests of honour were placed on her right and left, and the Raja himself was sandwiched between the Marwari millionaire and Edward Stringer.

Jamini Mohan Paul was in his element. He was just beginning to praise the exquisite quality of Indian food, when the Bhutia butler and his assistant brought in silver trays containing highly-spiced and deliciously cooked Indian and Persian dishes. In strict accordance with custom, the food was served in one single course, and all the different dishes were placed in silver bowls on a large circular silver tray. One could pick and choose, as and when one desired. There was no restriction on the choice of the various items of diet. Even

sweets and Indian puddings were placed in small silver dishes before each guest, so that they could start and end their meal with meat, fish, or sweets according to their individual choice. Light wines were also served in crystal glasses. There was an appetising aroma of Eastern spices in the dining-room which stimulated the guests to do full justice to the fare provided by the host.

Horatio Johnbull was somewhat cautious in tasting the different kinds of food placed before him in this one single course. The Marwari millionaire, being a vegetarian, ate only spiced vegetables, and large quantities of fruit. Hamida discarded her initial hesitation and tasted each dish placed on the silver tray. Sir Henry Boscombe and Edward Stringer relished the curries and kababs to which they were both accustomed. Jamini Mohan made a royal meal of everything. The host, like a true oriental, spent more time in pressing the guests to take more and still more of any particular dish they might fancy than in consuming food himself.

Soon after the dinner was over, the party retired to the drawing-room, where, to his surprise, Horatio Johnbull saw three nautch girls sitting comfortably and merrily on the carpet, surrounded by two Sarangiwalas, one Tabalchi and one Bell-ringer, also a maid-servant. They all rose from the carpeted floor, bowed, and paid the usual obeisance characteristic of all professional dancing-girls in India. Compliments were every now and then paid to these beautiful singing girls by Jamini Mohan Paul and the Marwari millionaire, who seemed to be entranced with the romantic gestures of one of the girls. Horatio Johnbull could not understand the meaning of the songs; but the Raja explained to him that almost all love songs in Hindi or Brij Bhasha were based upon the central theme of Krishna's love life.

The party broke up at midnight. Everyone present joined the chorus of applause accorded to the nautch girls and their instrumentalists. After thanking Hamida for her charming hospitality and sweet company, Horatio Johnbull and his friends entered their waiting

cars and said good-bye to the garden house and its owner. It had been a very enjoyable and a restful evening.

In the course of a casual conversation with Jamini Mohan Paul, two days later, Horatio Johnbull discovered that the charming Hamida was the Raja's favourite mistress, for whom he had purchased a secluded garden house to ward off the evil eyes of gossip mongers and mischief makers. Jamini said that it was not only customary but considered socially desirable, for wealthy landlords of late middle age to emphasise their importance by maintaining youthful mistresses. Marwari millionaires and successful businessmen of all classes also followed the example of their aristocratic friends, and thus a seemingly immoral practice became an honoured custom; so much so that, at one time, the possession of a mistress was regarded as a measure of wealth and vitality and a hallmark of personal and racial pride. The only drawback of the system, according to Jamini Mohan, was that the proud possessors of charming mistresses were not conversant with birth-control methods. He feared that, in years to come, there would be a bumper crop of illegitimate children who, in spite of their "blue blood," would find it difficult to trace their origin.

There were two essential differences between public prostitution as practised in the Temple of Sexual Glory and domesticated prostitution as cultivated in "garden houses." Firstly, the financial charge involved in the budget of an ordinary person in the former case was a temporary one; whereas, in the latter case, the permanent recurring charges could only be afforded by a rich man for whom money had a pleasure value. Secondly, the occasional "spree" of a young office assistant or a middle-aged jute merchant was a cheaper and more vulgar matter than the affection of a rich and seasoned voluptuary for an exclusive mistress for whom he rented a peaceful cottage some where on the riverside. The rich man loathed the idea of being pestered with frequent requests for ready cash,



embraces and cheap champagne, and therefore settled a monthly sum payable in advance to his beloved concubine. He did not regard himself as a mere vulgar sensualist.

Horatio Johnbull understood the real situation without further comment from Jamini Mohan Paul. He was neither surprised at, nor shocked with what he saw and heard about men, women and affairs. His thoughts went back to London and Paris where he had witnessed reckless orgies and scenes of unrestrained indulgence. He realised that in the East, as well as in the West, smiles and caresses were bought and sold at all times and in all seasons, and that the differences of caste, colour and creed disappeared in the overflowing rivulets of liquid money and sexual morbidity. After all, Calcutta was only a poor imitation of those European and American centres of commercialised vice where the idle rich and the curious youths of diverse nations drugged their glowing senses with drink and prostitution. Just as London, Paris and Vienna did not represent the true cultures of England, France and Austria, similarly Calcutta did not portray the real deep-seated culture of Bengal.

Civilisation in all countries was much the same from the tillers of the soil upwards—or downwards. Horatio Johnbull saw in India the vast gulf between the simple peasant and the cunning merchant, between the honest farmer and the wily dealer, between the primary producer and the secondary trader. It was almost impossible for him to trace any common ideals in their widely differing forms of living. Almost all those who derived their wealth and importance from the humble tiller of the soil acquired a habit of vicious living through breeding, upbringing and environment. The combined influence of these forces shaped the type of civilisation which different classes of people in the same country evolved for themselves. There was no sense in blaming individuals or classes of individuals for their vicious deeds. The system was to blame. The social

system which enabled them to live in perpetual leisure and to squander wealth on vice should have been rooted out long ago.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE FAREWELL BANQUET

The festive season for the residents and visitors of the ex-Imperial city was already on the wane. Polo matches had been played and won, or lost. The most important racing event of the season had provided its surprises for the punters, and many lacs of rupees had changed hands at the famous race-course. Garden parties and official banquets had completed their circle of monotony and variety. The chambers of commerce had finished their annual meetings and passed their usual resolutions. Political and educational speeches on what the speakers considered matters of Indian and Imperial importance had been duly delivered and commented upon by the Indian and anti-Indian press. Carnivals and variety shows had ceased to draw crowded houses. The princes, their retinues and hirelings, had already departed for their princely towns. And the Viceregal party had also left for Delhi, the Imperial capital and headquarters of the Central Government.

Horatio Johnbull had also completed his round of social and political engagements. He had seen men and women in the midst of this Eastern-Western pageant of life. He had witnessed the rising and ebbing tides of festivity and gaiety, and had formed impressions but no definite conclusions. He had studied at close range the glamour of the Eastern Farrago with all its unforgettable scenes of transient passions and pleasures. Before he reached the point of saturation and the stage of ineffable boredom, he received another urgent reminder from His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar, requesting him to pay a visit to his capital and to join

in the post-Christmas festivities. Since he had already given a definite promise to the Maharaja in New Delhi, he made a quick decision, and informed His Highness of his intention to leave for Premnagar on the 16th of January.

Sir Henry Boscombe received the news of Horatio Johnbull's intended departure with regret. Despite temperamental differences, which were fairly wide, the youthfully-old magnate admired the bonhomie of the frank hearted and unassuming politician, and felt that he would miss the genial companionship of the man for whom he had acquired an affection within so brief a period. With his usual energy he commenced his preparations for a farewell banquet and issued his invitations to a carefully selected list of friends for Friday, the 15th of January. The invitations were accepted either by telephone or by express letter, and Sir Henry looked forward to a successful display of his talents as host.

The private dining room at Ciro's was tastefully decorated for the evening. A small smoking lounge had been placed at the disposal of Sir Henry's guests. At 8 p. m. cocktails and short drinks were served by the smiling head butler, and at 8-30 p. m. the dinner was announced.

The party had been tactfully selected. Sir Henry had displayed fine judgment in bringing together the various mixed elements of Calcutta society into a farewell gathering. Besides the chief guest in whose honour the function was planned, Edward Stringer of the Bengal Secretariat was also there.

Sir Henry's intimate companions, Johnnie Johns and Harry Stephens had also accepted the invitation with delight. Jamini Mohan Paul considered it a privilege to join the farewell party and was in the smoking lounge long before the drinks were served. Bipin Bihari, the baby lover, accompanied Suriya Kumari, the film star. Motilal Chaudry, the young art critic of aristocratic descent, being an inseparable member of

the group, came with his friend Bipin Bihari. Dr. Satish Bannerji and his beautiful spouse, attended the function as a mark of respect for the amiable British politician. The Raja of Medipore also arrived with his Junior Rani, followed by his friend and admirer, Seth Bansi Mall, the indisputable millionaire. The Polish psychologist, Dr. Mitrosky, in his loose evening dress and flowing black necktie, also graced the occasion with his psychological presence and "continuity complex." Sir Joseph Jefferson, the well-known European banker, and Lady Jefferson, had very kindly accepted the invitation in the hope that they would meet a number of celebrities at Sir Henry's party. Oswald McIntyre, the tea planter from Assam, and his wife were spending a week in Calcutta. Being very old friends of Sir Henry Boscombe, they had accepted the invitation with the express purpose of demonstrating to the world that tea planting was a civilised occupation which did not turn a refined Scotchman into an Australian bushman. And lastly, Charlie Hemingway, the free-lance journalist, who never missed an opportunity of getting a free dinner at Ciro's and a good story into the bargain, had wangled an invitation for himself.

Since it was not a state banquet, Sir Henry had scattered his guests round the long dining-table, regardless of seniority and social status. The only precaution he had however, taken, was to distribute the five ladies in such a manner as to ensure a balanced effect in the entire gathering. Suriya Kumari sat next to Horatio Johnbull, and Lady Jefferson on the right side of the host.

Both the assistant manager and the head butler were familiar with Sir Henry's epicurean tastes. The menu and the wines were carefully and elaborately selected. The dinner went on smoothly and merrily, with intermittent talk on topics of casual interest. At 10 p. m. coffee and liqueurs were served.

At this stage of the farewell dinner, Sir Henry rose from his chair and addressed his guests. "Ladies and

Gentlemen," he began, "those of you who've come in contact with me know that I'm not much of a public speaker. I must therefore request you not to expect a brilliant speech from me.

"I suppose you all know that our chief guest, Mr. Horatio Johnbull, is leaving Calcutta to-morrow evening. It's likely that his many engagements in this country may keep him fully occupied till his return to England, and he may not be able to meet us again. I think I'm fully justified in saying that during his brief stay in our city, he has endeared himself to all those who have had the privilege of knowing him intimately. His lovable personality has made lasting impressions upon our minds, and we shall not easily forget him, even when he's thousands of miles away from us".

"Certainly not," said Suriya Kumari, and the other members of the fair sex agreed with her.

"It's neither customary nor desirable," continued Sir Henry, "to refer to political controversies in farewell speeches. But as our friend will carry back with him impressions of his experiences in this country, I think I should be failing in my duty if I were to avoid reference to the present situation and future possibilities.

"Briefly speaking, I may say that we're in a more or less settled state now. The various political factions in Bengal are getting accustomed to peaceful ways. There are at present no indications of those inflammatory outbursts which made the lives of Europeans and loyal Indians unsafe at the hands of a small band of fanatics in the past two decades. What we need at the present moment is a joint commercial offensive against the countries engaged in putting up trade barriers against the British Empire. Indians and Britishers must combine their forces in this offensive and fight as a single body against the tactics of foreign nations. We must form a strong Indo-British business alliance and fight courageously against high tariffs, commercial restrictions, currency manipulations and dumping.

"An eminent Indian politician whom I've known

for many years, spoke to me the other day, rather contemptuously about our worship of the 'Bitch Goddess.' He went so far as to say that we were not only a 'nation of shopkeepers,' but also an organised band of commercial marauders. As he was completely ignorant of the conditions of the business world, I refrained from entering into a lengthy argument with him. All the same, I pointed out that, but for our sympathy for the ryot and our precautionary methods against over-production in the jute industry, the cultivator would have collapsed under the strain of world depression. My friend, Seth Bansi Mall who is, as everybody knows, a prominent figure in the banking world, will certainly endorse my remarks about the urgent necessity of Indo-British co-operation in the field of commerce. It's not the politician, but the businessman who realises that there's vast scope for co-operation and mutual adjustment in matters commercial and industrial. By strengthening our joint forces we can make India perfectly safe against foreign competition."

Dr. Satish Bannerji, who had been either turned down or unfairly exploited by several European firms during his brief practice as a consulting geologist, could not understand the trend of Sir Henry's speech. He wanted to get up and expose the hollowness and insincerity of the jute manufacturer's claims. In view of the presence of ladies in the gathering, he remained silent and continued to listen to the speech with a cynical smile on his face. The charming ladies were already getting bored with the "Indo-British alliance" and its future possibilities. Seth Bansi Mall who had feasted on fruits, vegetables and preserved jams, felt jubilant over the personal reference to him. The rest of the guests were indifferent listeners.

Sir Henry, however, continued his speech: "I've no doubt that our friend has already ascertained the commercial point of view. If so, he'll agree with me that, for purposes of progressive and prosperous commerce,

we should have a stable and orderly Government in Bengal. So long as law and order are maintained, so long as racial discrimination is avoided, we do not care who comes into political power. All that we want is peace and prosperity through commercial unity with our Indian colleagues.

"I'm afraid, Ladies and Gentlemen, I've gone a bit too far into the field of commerce and politics. I shall not bother you with further discussion on the subject. I wish our friend Horatio Johnbull bon voyage and hope that he'll take back happy memories of our city to the good old country."

Sir Henry Boscombe had not exhausted himself by the act of speaking. He was far from tired with listening to his own voice. Fortunately for his guests, he realised in time that the occasion demanded some brevity. He resumed his seat in the midst of cheerful applause.

Horatio Johnbull was obviously expected to give a suitable reply to Sir Henry's farewell oration. With his usual readiness, he rose from his chair, and without any beating about the bush, started his speech.

"Sir Henry Boscombe, Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, "I consider myself very fortunate in being able to meet you all this evening, before my departure from Calcutta. Needless to say, I shall carry back to England very pleasant memories of my stay in your wonderful city. I've enjoyed the very best of hospitality, both Eastern and Western. I shall never forget the happy evenings I was privileged to spend with some of you. I cannot sufficiently thank you for your kind thoughts and friendly feelings.

"I'm sure you don't expect me to express my political views to night. As a matter of fact, I'm still wandering in a wilderness of doubt and hesitation, and am not in a position to make definite statements. I hope that in the near future, this uncertainty will disappear and my political outlook will become clearer.

"I take this opportunity of offering my grateful



thanks to Sir Henry and Jamini Mohan Paul, for having enabled me to form lasting links with your city. The world is not quite so large as it used to be in olden days when the means of communication were slow and tardy. I may not meet you again in Calcutta, but I'm sure I shall meet some of you in London when you decide to visit that city in the course of your next holidays. I wish to assure you that I shall always be happy to meet you and renew our friendly connections whenever and in whatever part of the globe we may meet again.

"The ladies are already looking tired. We shall do well to retire to the smoking lounge and finish our evening there."

The host and the guests retired to the lounge. Seth Bansi Mall, in his poetic Hindustani, paid subtle compliments to the Junior Rani of Medipore. Horatio Johnbull exchanged a few sweet words with Suriya Kumari. Sir Henry Boscombe entertained Lady Jefferson with amusing tales and imaginary heroic incidents. The others indulged in gossip on various topics.

The mail train left Howrah station at 7 p. m. carrying with it Horatio Johnbull and his Indian servant. Many handkerchiefs were waved in the air by male and female friends who had come to the platform to see him off. Many charming faces looked sad and depressed as the train steamed out of the railway station and receded into a distant haze. Impressions and sweet memories were carried and left behind, and the journey through the plains of India to distant places was continued once again.

**PART FOUR**  
**THE PRINCELY HOTHOUSE**



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE VISITORS OF VILLA MARINA

Villa Marina, or what was officially described as the European Guest House, was, next to His Highness's principal palace, the pride of the Indian State of Premnagar. It was originally conceived in the mind of the Maharaja in 1930, during one of his nocturnal visits to a Bohemian haunt on the outskirts of Vienna, where through the medium of "wine and women," he met a young Austro-Italian architect named Gorio Vincenzi. The Architect was Italian by birth, and Austrian by breeding and education, and possessed a rare combination of the artistic talents of those two countries. The Maharaja himself, at the time, being only thirty-two and a renowned patron of arts, fell madly in love with the young architect and his two beautiful dancing companions. The result of this royal emotion was an earnest invitation to all three artists to visit His Highness's dominions at His Highness's expense and to design a modern villa for the exclusive use of His Highness's European and Indian guests.

During the building of Villa Marina, Gorio Vincenzi and his two fascinating companions were housed in one of the most luxurious apartments of the palace, and were given every possible facility to practise and improve their artistic gifts. By their intimate contact with His Highness, they added charm and Western homeliness to the palace. They also designed various furnishing schemes for the European Guest House. The question of expenditure was only a minor one. The major difficulty was to secure sufficient craftsmen and skilled decorators in India to meet the needs

of modern construction and lay-out. Artisans were therefore imported from all parts of Europe to give finishing touches to the various decorative schemes executed by Indian workmen under the supervision of the Austro-Italian architect.

Since the completion of Villa Marina was to take two years, His Highness meanwhile utilised the services of the architect in converting one of the drawing-rooms at the Palace into a spacious ballroom. The dancing-floor was sprung and covered with beautifully polished teakwood. Gorio's two dancing companions were always eager to initiate His Highness into the complicated steps of Mexican and Brazilian dances, which were in vogue in those days. The Maharaja became a perfect dancer, the European Guest House became the pride of Premnagar, and the two Austrian girls became the envy of His Highness's invisible harem.

At long last, the famous Villa was completed in 1932, with all the comforts that modern science could place at the disposal of a builder, and with all the luxuries that East and West could provide.

Its location was indeed unique. It was situated on a small plateau adjoining an artificial lake which had been specially built by His Highness's late father who was exceptionally fond of boating and fishing. The main entrance faced the northern drive leading to the orchards and gardens attached to His Highness's palace. The bed and retiring rooms on the first and second floors faced the lake. The drawing and dining rooms on the ground floor opened into a semicircle of private gardens, and the main reception hall occupied the major portion of the first floor. The huge terrace on to which the outer doors of the reception hall opened overlooked the stately drive and was supported by a gigantic portico of the Italian style.

The interior of Villa Marina was dignified in appearance and altogether foreign in workmanship. Every nail and screw, every aluminium and chromium fitting, every oxidised silver handle, every slab of

marble and sheet of glass, every piece of polished and seasoned timber, had been imported from some corner or other of Europe. Over fifty thousand pounds of good Indian money had been converted into cheap continental currencies to satisfy a royal whim which had its origin in a popular *weingarten* in the outskirts of Vienna. It was however a matter of great pride and satisfaction to His Highness to feel that distinguished European visitors to the capital of his dominions could not find fault with Eastern hospitality in a Western disguise. The question of money did not arise where the honour and ancestral glory of the rulers of Premnagar were involved.

Horatio Johnbull arrived in Premnagar on the evening of the 17th of January. He had seen so little of the East, and so much of the West that he wondered whether he would ever see anything of real India, the Indian India which he was informed was vastly different from the cosmopolitan port of Bombay, the Imperial City of New Delhi, and the ex-Imperial town of Calcutta. At Premnagar once again he was surrounded by Western comfort and Western luxury, by liveried butlers and uniformed messenger boys, by shower baths and panelled walls, by table telephones and concealed radios, by British and American journals. He was in the very heart of Indian India, and yet in the midst of Western settings. So far, there was nothing mystical about India, and nothing spiritual about Indian India. Everything was blatantly an imitation of western surroundings. He had come out to feel the pulse of the East, but he was witnessing the delirium of the West wherever he went. It was, he thought, a tragedy to think in terms of the spiritual and to live in terms of morbid materialism. He was disappointed, not with himself, but with the Indian India which he had expected to find restful and soothing after his recent experiences in Calcutta. His first impressions were unfavourable but he hoped for better things of Premnagar on closer acquaintance. In the midst of these

reflections, he was roused to activity by a loud knock at the door of his sitting-room. A second later a tall young man of dignified appearance and disciplined manners walked into the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Johnbull," said the visitor, "my name is Thakur Bachan Singh. I am commanded by His Highness to convey his kindest regards to you, and to enquire if you are comfortably settled in your new surroundings."

"Do sit down, Mr. Singh," answered Horatio Johnbull. "Please convey my hearty thanks to His Highness for his kind enquiry and assure him that I'm most comfortably settled here."

After a brief silence, the young man said: "I am acting as the Superintendent of the State Gardens; but His Highness has been pleased to place me on special duty during your stay in his Capital."

"I'm so glad to have the pleasure of your company and the benefit of your guidance," said Horatio Johnbull favourably impressed with the young man's modesty. "You seem to have spent a part of your life in Europe. Am I right?"

"You are quite correct," answered Bachan Singh. "I spent three years in Paris, and two years in California, in the study of horticulture. On my return, His Highness gave me the entire charge of the gardens and forests. I am also a titled Jagirdar and receive fixed annual revenue from my estate."

"So you're a landed proprietor," remarked Horatio Johnbull. "For how many generations has your family held the estate?"

"For two generations," answered the young Thakur. "The estate was granted to my grandfather by the grandfather of the present ruler. My grandfather's mother was a favourite lady of the royal household in those days. Through her beauty and personal charms, she was able to secure a permanent grant of land revenue for the maintenance of her only son and his heirs."

At this stage, the head butler brought in drinks, and the conversation drifted into other channels, Horatio Johnbull learnt that Villa Marina was occupied by several other guests who had arrived for the shooting season, which had already commenced. The Austro-Italian architect occupied a suite of rooms, and another suite was allotted to his two dancing companions, who, whatever their real names may have been, were popularly known as Marguerita and Pamita, a strange mixture of Italian and Spanish names. Since their artistic guidance in dancing was necessary not only for His Highness himself, but also for his daughters and guests, they were given luxurious quarters where they could impart inspiration to others, and also retain their own youthful symmetry with the necessary exercises.

Another suite was placed at the disposal of Lt.-Col. William Softhead, who had arrived a week earlier in connection with the training and equipment of His Highness's Highland Infantry, and who was looking forward to spending a couple of days in the state forests in search of tigers, panthers and other animals that might cross his path. The famous Colonel was military adviser to several Indian States. Although he was naturally imperialistic in his views, he did not care a brass button for the actual efficiency of the troops. He was mainly concerned with the excellent quality of the uniforms, which he seemed to regard as the first essential of all military success. He was not a businessman, otherwise he would have been handsomely subsidised by manufacturers of button-polishes, belt and boot-makers, and military tailors. He was himself smart in appearance, and was always equipped with a goldrimmed monocle while inspecting troops at 8 a. m. on a wintry morning. He was a pet of the Army Headquarters, and a darling of the Army Ministers in Indian States.

Another suite was occupied, more or less permanently (at least so it appeared to the housekeeper of



the European Guest House) by Lord and Lady Rockbottom who, after overspending their annual income by one-third in less than half of their financial year had closed down their London residence, and as a measure of temporary economy, had migrated to Premnagar at the special request of His Highness, the Maharaja Sahib. His Lordship was less than thirty, and Her Ladyship, who had resigned a lucrative job in a west-end theatre in favour of a more lucrative (she hoped) matrimonial venture was barely twenty five years of age. They were both vigorously healthy and passionately fond of acrobatic dancing, an art in which Her Ladyship had excelled during her chorus days. Modern ballroom dancing was child's play for them. They could go on dancing vigorously till all hours of morning, and both being handsome and well-built, they made a graceful picture to those who watched them. His Highness had made their acquaintance in London in one of those cabaret shows where "Society" mingles freely with the artistic and Bohemian set. Being brother aristocrats, Rockbottom and the Prince had developed an affection for each other, and the present visit to His Highness's dominions was an outward proof of that intimacy. The Rockbottoms were now so familiar with the Maharaja and his favourite daughters that they could visit the palace at all hours of the day and night. His Lordship was particularly pleased with the mildly invigorating climate of Premnagar, and he refused to think of leaving the State and returning to the cold and merciless clutches of the English winter.

Another suite was occupied by a middle aged civilian named Archibald A. Spender, who had been specially deputed by the Department for the Protection and Preservation of Princely India to discuss the unusual merits of the Federal Scheme, with the Prime Minister and other dignitaries of the State. He was, like any other civilian of his age and political experience, pompous in office but unassuming in a drawing-room.

He wore an expression warranted to show that he was seriously engaged on a secret mission, and had the worries of the whole Empire on his slender shoulders. Although he had nearly completed his mission, he considered it advisable, in view of the forthcoming tiger hunt, to prolong his stay and to inhale the fragrant air of the pine forests for another week. He was keen on physical fitness and had never missed the opportunity of a fast swim in the adjoining lake, in spite of the bitterly cold winds of early morning.

And yet another suite was occupied by Dewan Bahadur Sir Ananda Kumarswamy, a lawyer who had come all the way from Madras to advise His Highness's Government on the implications and legal complications of the Federal Scheme. He was no longer an orthodox Brahmin who must anoint his forehead with sandalwood paste and bathe in holy waters after touching, or even coming in the shadow of an untouchable person. He was a great lawyer, a great man of the world, who knew how to adjust his ways of life to the immediate surroundings. He was not sure as to whether he had succeeded in instructing His Highness's Foreign Minister in the intricacies of the proposed Federal Constitution. He was, however, certain that he had definitely succeeded, in creating a favourable impression on Mr. Archibald A. Spender, who, without much haggling or ado had accepted his suggestions for incorporation in the Instrument of Accession. Sir Ananda had an aptitude for making himself popular with the members of the fair sex, and His Highness was indeed glad to have him in all his private parties, where charming ladies were in need of charming companionship. The eminent lawyer had a winning smile and a fascinating wink in his right eye. Since he was earning his hundred pounds a day in glorious weather and good company, he was glad that the Federal discussions had not come to an abrupt end.

And lastly, a suite of rooms had been specially reserved for Sir David Diehard and his daughter

Cynthia, who were expected to arrive on the morning of the 21st of January for a week's holiday and sport.

After having given Horatio Johnbull an insight into the affairs and personalities of Villa Marina, Thakur Bachan Singh apologised for doing so much talking. "I am sorry," he said, "for having left you very little time for dressing for dinner. I shall call for you at 9.45 tomorrow morning. His Highness would like to receive you at ten. Good night."

"Good night," said Horatio Johnbull, as the young visitor passed out of the door. And then he commenced his preparations for meeting the resident visitors of Villa Marina in the large dining-room on the ground floor.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS

The Packard saloon, placed at Horatio Johnbull's disposal by His Highness, covered the distance of two miles from Villa Marina to the Old Palace in less than five minutes. The broad cemented road was lined on both sides by tall eucalyptus trees, and there was a pleasant aroma in the air. The golden rays of the sun were just beginning to impart warmth and colour to the green bushes carefully grown around the spacious lawns of the European Guest House. There was peace and calm in the neighbourhood of the Old Palace; but there was considerable human activity within the boundary walls.

The Old Palace, in spite of its name, was not altogether old in style or internal lay-out. The exterior of the southern portion adjoining the outer wall was indeed ancient but the interior had been remodelled to suit the varying tastes of the successive rulers of Premnagar. Additional blocks of buildings had been added to the original temple-like structure, from time to time, and from age to age, with the result that, from the outside, the Old Palace looked more like a series of permanent barracks than a royal residence. Since the internal decorations had been recently perfected by Gorio Vincenzi and his two dancing companions, His Highness did not bother much about external appearances. Moreover, the harem quarters were occupied only by old and discarded concubines, and the public rooms were used more for official interviews than for his private needs. It really seemed immaterial whether

the Old Palace looked like a dignified residence of the ruling family, or like a series of military barracks.

Accompanied by Thakur Bachan Singh, Horatio Johnbull passed through carpeted passages and panelled lobbies, and was finally announced into the presence of His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar. Unlike his brother princes, the Maharaja was invariably punctual in his engagements; so much so that his punctuality was regarded more as a vice than as a virtue by his Ministers and Secretaries who, in other climes and states, had been accustomed to mixing up the hours of day and night.

The room in which Horatio Johnbull was received was His Highness's private study. It was a very spacious room and its walls were lined with bookcases containing works of history, geography, travel and recent publications. A large table was littered with periodicals and official reports. Parisian journals, and picture magazines, American reviews, and British weeklies were all available. Large-scale maps of the world, of Great Britain and Ireland, of India and Australia, and of Premnagar and its districts, decorated three walls of the room. His Highness was not only punctual, but also well-informed.

"I hope you had a comfortable journey from Calcutta, Mr. Johnbull," he said, as he greeted his distinguished guest.

"The journey was comfortable and the weather was simply delightful," answered Horatio Johnbull; "but I must admit I was rather depressed to see the condition of some of the villages on both sides of the railway line. I didn't see a single smiling face anywhere."

"My dear friend," interrupted His Highness, "when you leave prosperous towns like Bombay and Calcutta, you should be prepared for spectacles of poverty and misery. If we were to worry our young hearts over passing scenes of this nature, we should cease to enjoy the good things of life that God has granted to us. Let's now talk about something

refreshing. How d'you like Villa Marina and its present occupants?"

"Villa Marina," replied Horatio Johnbull, "is a wonderful specimen of modern architecture. I'm afraid I can't say much about my fellow guests at present, as I met them only last night. They appear to be a cheerful crowd.

"I'm glad you like Villa Marina," said His Highness with some triumph in his voice. "It has always been one of my ambitions to provide an up-to-date residence for my guests. Gorio and the two girls laboured over the plans and decorations for two years and finally produced a building which has become the envy of my brother princes. The situation itself is superb. Even if the weather is hot and oppressive, you needn't go to Switzerland for a change. You have all the comforts and luxuries of life in Villa Marina and the lake."

His Highness suddenly realised that he was singing his own praises. He was also afraid that he might in an unguarded moment reveal the true secret of the origin of Villa Marina. He therefore changed the topic of conversation.

Resting his elbows on the table and his chin on his hands, His Highness adopted a reflective attitude. Horatio Johnbull crossed his legs somewhat restlessly.

"Mr. Johnbull," said the Maharaja quietly; "you have attended quite a lot of political meetings, and have met a number of eminent persons in the Indian political life. Can you give me the benefit of your views on the question of Federation? I suppose you know that we have to make up our minds very soon?"

"Your Highness," replied Horatio Johnbull, "you've asked me a very awkward question. In the first place, I haven't studied the Indian problem in its entirety, and in the second place, I haven't heard your side of the story. As far as the general outline goes, I should say that the whole idea of Federation is an excellent one, and that sooner or later, the participation

of Indian States in the affairs of the country is bound to bring about national oneness which India lacks today."

"Your last remark is to the point," observed His Highness; "but unfortunately it rather overlooks our side of the story. I don't know whether you have ever dabbled in the history of Indian States and their evolution. If you haven't I should like to tell you that, with the exception of Rajputana states and my own, the majority of states were either created or pirated during the time of the East India Company. Although a great deal of our early history is untraceable, I believe it's definitely established now that the origin and institutions of the States belonging to our group are very ancient. We are the only true survivals of the Rajput system which gave the rulers the sole duty of protecting the citizens against the attacks of the enemy.

"Now coming back to the question of Federation, let's assume that the majority of states were formed in one way or another long before the assumption of the Government of this country by the Crown. It is therefore clear that the privileged position of our Order has remained unassailable for over a century and a half now. We have been protected not only by our divine birth, but also by our ancient traditions and by our treaties with the Paramount Power. Throughout these long years, our subjects have stood outside the circle drawn around ourselves by our divine birth and destiny. Till recently, our Ministers and Councillors were mere hirelings, employed by us to act on our behalf and to serve our purpose. All of a sudden, we are asked to part with our divine privileges and rights, and to hurl ourselves into the whirlpool of an immature and unintelligent Indian democracy. Do you honestly believe that a Federal Scheme which involves the uprooting of our traditional rights would be acceptable to the members of our Princely Order?"

"Your Highness," said Horatio Johnbull in a dignified and deliberate voice. "Our past intimacy encourages me to speak plainly. Those members of

the Princely Order who have visited Europe and discussed matters freely and frankly with British and Indian politicians, should realise that the times are changing rapidly. Divine rights are no longer accepted by democracy, especially if the popular voice is flouted. Traditional rights are thrown overboard by a democratic Government when the economic welfare of the people is endangered by the exclusive possession of those rights. Human beings, even in Indian States, will soon begin to feel that they are human. And when they do, your divine dignity will suffer a hard blow. Your loyalty to the British Crown will certainly protect the birthright of your eldest son, but it will not save *you* from the inconvenience and humiliation of having to face a disgruntled and starving population. You'll have to adapt yourself and your methods of administration to the requirements of the new political age."

"I didn't know that you had germs of socialism in you, Mr. Johnbull," remarked the Maharaja in a slightly disturbed voice. "The majority of M. P's. I have met in my life are good old Conservatives, who believe in the divine rights of kings and are always out to crush any movement that threatens the existence of royalty and aristocracy. I am sure those horrible socialists of Bombay have prejudiced your mind against the position taken up by us."

"I'm not a socialist in the accepted sense of the word, but I do believe in justice and fair play. A king's rights can only be protected if the people's rights are respected."

"The situation is somewhat exceptional in my State," replied the Maharaja. "I am regarded as the symbol of Divine authority by my subjects. My physical needs and cash requirements are greater than theirs. I have a divine right over the entire revenues of the State, but in my generosity, I take only fifty lacs a year for my personal use and hand over the balance of one crore to my Ministers for the purpose of carrying on the administration of the State. Don't you think I deal



justly and fairly with my subjects?"

"I'm afraid I don't know the custom governing household budgets in other Indian States; but I'm sure that no Parliament in any state in Europe would allow the monarch to appropriate one-third of the entire revenue for his personal use."

"European monarchs do not know how to rule," said the Maharaja, with a sardonic smile on his face. "They should come out to Premnagar for a brief course of training in the appropriation of revenues by dictatorial methods."

"Those who did attempt dictatorship in financial matters had to fly away from their castles and palaces, and seek refuge in foreign lands. No sane monarch would try these stunts now-a-days."

Horatio Johnbull's pungent retort was drowned in the babel of voices in the adjoining hall, where His Highness's agents and A.D.C.'s. were fighting a wordy battle with a French merchant who had come from Bombay to sell his diamonds. His Highness was naturally annoyed with this disturbance, and angry at the disgraceful behaviour of his personal staff. However, before he could press the bell to summon the A.D.C. in waiting, the Frenchman burst into the study followed by an A.D.C. and a Gujerati merchant who acted as His Highness's broker.

"Seigneur, Your Highness," shouted the Frenchman, "I have travelled all the way from Bombay to do good business here. I have a beautiful white-blue diamond to offer. It weighs fifty carats, and is a real beauty. I sell it for fifty thousand rupees, but your broker persists one lac on me."

Before the Frenchman had finished his story, the Maharaja ordered him to sit down in a comfortable chair, and then he said. "If Gijubhai is offering you one lac for your beautiful diamond, what are you grumbling about? You were behaving as if you had been badly treated by my staff."

"It was not the price, Your Highness, that irritated

me. It was the other condition of the bargain. He wanted me to bring two beautiful girls from *Folies Bergère* that Your Highness seen in Paris last year. I told him my line of business is diamonds, not chorus girls. He said no. If I want to sell my beautiful diamond, I must get the beautiful girls. I lost my temperament, and he refuses to do straight business with me."

The Maharaja turned round to Horatio Johnbull and apologised for this unexpected digression; after which, he resumed his conversation with the Frenchman.

"Look here, Monsieur Gerant," he said, "if you are getting an extra fifty thousand for nothing, why don't you assist me in adding to my collection of beautiful dancing girls? I am sure the two Parisian beauties will be far happier here than in the *Folies Bergère*, where they can't earn enough to pay for their underwears. You should take a charitable view of Gijubhai's demand. In Paris, their living depends upon the whims and fancies of aged silk mercers and young impoverished counts, whereas in my capital, they will be treated as dancing queens and will have all modern luxuries at their disposal. Don't you think that the proposal is a fair one from every point of view?"

"Oui, the proposal, Seigneur," answered Monsieur Gerant, "is fair enough. But, you see, I am an old man now and the pretty *damoiselles* would not care to fall to my decaying charms."

"It's not your charms, whether fresh or withering, that will bring them to my State. It's the promise of a bright future that will do the trick. You will make a handsome profit on the diamond, and the girls will make a fortune out of me. Now, what's your final answer to Gijubhai's generous offer?"

The Frenchman hesitated for a few moments, and then nodded assent. "If Your Highness will let me have the money tomorrow morning, I will do the needful within one month. It is better that you send one of your beautiful A.D.Cs. with me. The one who was

fighting with me in the other room is tall and fair. He will suit the purpose admirably."

The Maharaja in his divine generosity ordered the payment of money and wished the diamond merchant every success in his brave enterprise.

"I'm sorry to have spoiled our instructive conversation," he said to Horatio Johnbull; "We must resume our discussions in a more peaceful atmosphere. Upon my word, I can't understand the mentality of these foreign merchants! They shout and grouse when you offer them a low price and a long credit, and they make a devil of a noise when you offer them double the price and a quick payment."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE WALLED CITY AND THE BARREN FIELDS

Early next morning, Thakur Bachan Singh brought another friend along with him to Villa Marina. This particular friend was originally the procurer-in-chief, by special appointment to His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar. But as time went on and he became familiar with the internal intrigues of the State, he became Superintendent of the State Kennels, and ultimately acquired full and complete charge of all the pedigree dogs and bitches maintained and bred by His Highness for sporting and domestic purposes. In his spare time, he acted as the court jester and enjoyed all the privileges which a royal buffoon enjoyed in the medieval courts of France. He was also the Secretary and chief organiser of the Whippet Racing Club. He had no very unpretentious name, being known all over the State as Captain Jackie Jackson.

Captain Jackson had a unique personality. He was only just over five feet in height, but had a singularly agile body for his age. With sharp eyes and a talkative tongue, he presented a picture of perpetual motion. The hair on his temples was already turning grey, but the abundance of hair on his head deceived the casual observer as to the Captain's real age. He was always smartly dressed, and had the appearance of a gentleman of leisure and unlimited means. With the proverbial last bean in his pocket, he could pose as a millionaire, and in this pose, he had in the past succeeded in winning the confidence of many a needy job-hunter and adventurer. At the conclusion of the Great War, he was

just over twenty-six, and like many others of his profession, was thrown into the merciless labour market, where men better qualified than himself were bought and sold as taxi-drivers, shop assistants and so on. Being ambitious and adventurous, he would not lower his social position by accepting any odd job that was offered to him by an officious labour exchange. His experiences in the cavalry enabled him to go in for professional riding. He became a jockey and earned a respectable living by riding on commission for trainers and owners of race horses. For more than five years, he carried on his new profession with success but at last he had to retire from the turf through the unpardonable impediment of a bulging constitution. His services were immediately requisitioned by an Australian breeder of race horses who had a prosperous branch office in London, and a still more flourishing office in Bombay. Captain Jackie joined the firm in London but soon extended his operations to Bombay and Calcutta, where horse racing was a popular hobby of rich baronets, richer princes, and still richer industrial magnates.

But as usual, his mania for betting landed him in financial hot waters, and at the ripe age of forty, he found himself up against it once again. He was in a glorious state of total slump when he met the Maharaja of Premnagar at Ciro's in Calcutta in 1932, during the Christmas season. By this time, his knowledge of colloquial and slang Hindustani was indeed remarkable, and still more praiseworthy was his experience of demi-mondes and deserted wives of army officers and impotent jute-brokers. Very soon he succeeded in gaining the confidence and affection of the divinely generous Maharaja, and at the close of the season, he accompanied him to his dominions.

In Premnagar, the worthy Captain evolved a new idea, and started the Whippet Racing Club. He went in for breeding dogs as he had once bred horses and soon brought the State Kennels to a pitch of perfection by the zeal and vigour he put into the job. His smutty

tales and vulgar jokes about the sexual characteristics and morbidities of different nations under different conditions endeared him to his generous master, and finally he was able to establish for himself a strong position of popularity and financial security.

With all his shortcomings, Captain Jackson was a rare specimen of humanity, who combined evil with good to a remarkable degree. He was kind-hearted to the poor, and generous to the needy girls whom he enticed to Premnagar with all sorts of promises. He never took undue advantage of his intimacy with the ruler of the state. He loathed the system of palace intrigue and always adopted an attitude of indifference to the unsavoury tales brought to him by the slaves and maid servants of the royal household. He had a private suite of rooms in one of his Highness's exclusive palaces and lived there in luxury without having to share in the burdens of slanderous intrigue. Being a privileged jester, he was always brutally frank and familiar with the Maharaja. To the outside world, he was just a hired servant of the State in charge of the kennels.

At nine on the morning of Tuesday, the 19th of January, Thakur Bachan Singh introduced Captain Jackson to Horatio Johnbull in the vestibule of Villa Marina. Although the morning was bitterly cold, the small private dining-room facing the circular lawns outside was comfortably cosy. Even in formal and sober company, Jackie Jackson could not refrain from boisterously jovial conversation. As soon as they sat down to breakfast, he started to hold forth in his racy style.

"I say, Mr. Johnbull," he said, "how d'you find our little capital after your stay in Calcutta?"

"I don't find much difference between Villa Marina and the Ritz," answered Horatio Johnbull. "I suppose there must be places where one can get a glimpse of the real life in Indian India".

"Don't you worry your little head about Indian

India," said Jackie familiarly : "there's plenty of it all around us. This little colony of ours is a sort of stage effect which His Highness is very fond of displaying to his distinguished guests. I'll show you the real stuff this morning after we've finished our breakfast. As a matter of fact, Bachan Singh wanted me to take you round the town, and show you some of our ancient temples and palaces. He's a little coward when it comes to smelling the gases of our old streets. Isn't it so Bachan?"

"I don't think I am a coward," replied Bachan Singh; "but I do need your pleasant company to ward off the evil effects of the nauseating gases."

"I'm grateful to both of you for your kind offer," said Horatio Johnbull. "I would certainly like to see the old city and any other places you might care to show me"

"Bravo!" shouted Jackie. "Before we proceed further, I would like you to drop the damned 'Captain' altogether, and to stick to my charming Christian name—Jackie. If this's agreed and no formalities are observed, I'm sure we shall all have a thundering good time together. We shall also have a picnic *à trois* at the foot of the hills. I'll rush the old butler and get a tiffin basket ready in less than half an hour."

Parks and palaces were left behind. Public buildings and imposing edifices were no longer visible. Asphalt roads turned into metalled roads, and finally the Packard saloon entered the main gate of the walled city of Premnagar.

Jackie had not exaggerated Bachan Singh's objection to inhaling strong odours. The gutters of the city were choked with mud and stinking rubbish. The drains had become gaseous through sheer neglect. In spite of the cold weather, flies and poisonous insects covered the large heaps of sweetmeats and other food-stuffs laid in pyramidal heaps on straw matting and narrowrimmed baskets by their vendors. The majority of low-roofed shops along the narrow street were in a

state of irreparable decay. Beggars with jingling bells were moving from door to door collecting uncooked rice from charitable householders. Sadhus, bespattered with mud and ashes, were bending over smouldering fires at the corners of the streets warming their holy bodies with whatever warmth they could get from the fire and the foul atmosphere around them. Scantly clad and bare-footed children were rushing behind their mothers in a long row to have an early glimpse of *Saraswati*, the Goddess of Learning, enshrined in a small temple in the open square. Donkeys and mules, laden with dry wood and charcoal were unburdening themselves in front of small stores. Sacred bulls and stray dogs were audaciously blocking the slowly moving human and animal traffic. Monkeys were grinning and jeering at the passersby, and the poor emaciated human beings in rags who contributed to the revenues of His Highness were raising their faces and hands towards *Suriya Devata*, praying for a square meal and for the continuity of their wretched existence.

This dismal pageant of humanity was only brightened by a few gaily-painted houses built by wealthy Marwaris whose forefathers were shrewd enough to make money in speculation in Bombay and Calcutta. Some of them had returned from distant towns to celebrate their daughters' marriages, or to form new links with their kith and kin who had remained in Premnagar in the hope of making money out of usurious banking. Their taste, especially in architecture, was of the poorest. They spent money recklessly in studding their ceilings with chips of glass and broken china, and in covering the floors of their living-rooms with diverse patterns of waste Italian marble. They had no idea of modern comfort, no conception of design and style. They loudly advertised their riches by adding to the coloured ugliness of the walled city of Premnagar.

Narrow lanes, partly covered with overhead bridges, ran in a zig-zag fashion throughout the entire city. By



some miracle of chance, all these lanes ended in the central square, a huge rectangular courtyard where the oldest palace and His Highness's Toshakhana were situated. Sentries in navy-blue jackets and shorts guarded almost all the approaches to the Court House, where the State jewels were kept in glass cases for public inspection. At one time in the history of the State, His Highness's forefathers must have collected and preserved enormous quantities of emeralds, pearls, diamonds, sapphires and rubies. In the central hall of the Court House there was a golden throne (an old-fashioned gadi) with precious stones embedded in the two arms of the howdah-like chair. There were rows and rows of necklaces, pendants, ear-rings, bejewelled bangles, anklets, and other Indian ornaments of exquisite design and patient workmanship. It was humanly impossible to compute the value of all these articles in terms of British or Indian currencies.

There were wide thoroughfares all around the central square; the only place in the walled city where the sunshine played its natural and benevolent part. One of these thoroughfares led to a blind alley, at the furthest end of which stood the famous Toshakhana, where silver and gold howdahs were preserved and kept in good condition for ceremonial occasions and processions. Another narrow road led to the private door of the oldest palace where His Highness's 'step-mothers and grand-aunts resided in a truly oriental style. Since, according to the old Rajput custom, even the ancient ladies were not allowed to uncover their faces to strangers and outsiders, there were high protective walls inside the oldest palace. To preserve the sanctity of the persons of the aged ladies, no male servants were permitted beyond the second fortification.

The Packard saloon moved around the central square, and passed through the narrow streets, as far as it was possible to move even at snail's pace. It halted outside the Court House for some time and resumed its slow journey to the Royal Toshakhana. It moved

on again and went around the various temples, specially reserved for the exclusive use of the royal family. After passing through winding lanes and odoriferous streets, it finally found its way to the southern gate of the walled city, and soon it was once again gathering speed on the main road leading to the Rajeshwari Gardens at the foot of the hills.

"By Jove! This visit has opened my eyes to the realities of life amongst the poorer Indians," remarked Horatio Johnbull in a sorrowful tone, as the car sped through barren fields and deserted hamlets. "I've seen poverty in the slums of London, and hunger and suffering in the obscure corners of Delhi. I've seen the headquarters of the beggars of Calcutta; but I've never come across such vast disparity between the living conditions of the rulers and the ruled within a space of a few square miles. I think it's heart-rending."

Jackie listened to these depressing remarks in his usual casual manner. Bachan Singh was impressed with the sympathetic attitude of the British politician towards the sufferings of the poor.

"I'm glad in a way," observed Jackie Jackson, "that you found the walled city both tiring and disgusting. His Highness would never listen to us, nor would the bearded Prime Minister, who believes in preserving the sanctity of Hinduism in an un-Hindu fashion. The old humbug thinks that poverty, filth and desperate hunger keep the people in a religious frame of mind, without which they can neither pray to the greater glory of Brahma and Vishnu, nor retain their faith in the divine origin of the ruling family."

"Who's this worthy Prime Minister?" asked Horatio Johnbull impatiently, "who's so keen on hanging people at the altar of religion? Surely the world has moved far enough to leave such stupid despots behind? If the Maharaja believes, and he told me he did, in dictatorial methods, why does he listen to the callous advice of the Prime Minister?"

Bachan Singh raised himself from the reclining

position into which he had unconsciously sunk, and said: "His Highness is very fond of talking about dictatorship. When it comes to final decisions of vital importance, he just initials the papers placed before him by our Chief. The unfortunate part of the administration in Indian States is that the selection of Prime Ministers is indirectly determined by the unseen hand of the Big Power, and the rulers are not expected to interfere in the day-to-day administration of the various departments. The most curious thing about the whole affair is that, even in private household matters, the Prime Minister is entitled to interfere."

"It seems to me," said Horatio Johnbull, "that from the standpoint of democracy, it's more desirable to rely on the judgment of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet than to focus all power in one man who persists in the antediluvian conception of divine rights."

"My dear Mr. Johnbull," said Bachan Singh, with youthful warmth, "your Western principles of democracy do not apply to Indian States. Your Prime Ministers are fundamentally different from ours. I am sorry I can't divulge State secrets. All that I can say at the present moment is that, in almost every department of the State, vicious intrigue is rampant. Those underlings who succeed in reaching the ears of His Highness through the Prime Minister get all the kudos. Those who are honest and hard-working are completely ignored. In short, no one cares for the welfare of the people."

"That's perfectly obvious from the existing condition," remarked Horatio Johnbull.

"I say, you people are indulging in highbrow political talk," said Jackie, with a suppressed yawn. "Look at the barren fields on the left and the sugarcane plantations on the right. We're not far from the gardens now."

In spite of the uneven surface of the road and frequent obstacles in the shape of half-starved cows and emaciated buffaloes, the Packard saloon continued

its journey towards the foothills of the State. With the exception of a few sugar-cane plantations, for which a thirty years' monopoly was held by a rich Bania from Bombay, the rest of landscape presented a gloomy picture of desolation and barrenness. Straggling villages, sheltered only by small leafless trees, were scattered all over the countryside. There were no signs of prosperity anywhere, except on the brightly coloured exteriors of the two-storeyed houses built on the roadside by the munims (agents) of rich Marwaris, for the purpose of conducting their money-lending transactions with the poor owners of roofless huts, and dilapidated hamlets. There were also some signs of human activity around the small rest-houses built by the State for the official use of its officers. The human beings seen in the vicinity of these bungalows were clad in worn-out crimson coats discarded by British soldiers, which seemed too large for their insignificant bodies. Barring these and a few scattered shopkeepers who sold stale vegetables, rice, gur and tobacco, there were no other persons in sight.

At last, the saloon ascended the first gradient at the foot of the hills, and after covering a mile or two of curves and sharp turns, drove straight into the uppermost terrace of the Rajeshwari Gardens, which, like many other old gardens in India, were laid out in three ascending terraces connected with each other by sloping footpaths and covered passages. The keeper of the gardens had been informed of the visit of the distinguished guest and his two companions. He had arranged a large white table and several enamelled cane chairs under the royal pavilion situated above the low waterfall which irrigated the gardens. After bending and bowing, and almost touching the ground, he conducted the party to the table and stood to attention for further orders. Assisted by the chauffeur and a gardener, the keeper opened the tiffin basket and produced bundles of sandwiches, meat patties, cakes and assorted sweets, dried fruits, and also half a dozen

bottles of beer. The picnic began in royal style, and every member of the party did full justice, not only to his appetite, but also to the food and drinks placed before him.

"Let's resume our previous talk," said Horatio Johnbull after he had quenched his thirst with a glass of excellent beer. "I don't wish to pry into State secrets, but I do want you to tell me something about the administrative machinery."

Bachan Singh was not inclined to say more than he had already said. Jackie came to his rescue and supplied the necessary information.

"You see, Mr. Johnbull," he said, "it's like this: Bachan Singh is an old grumbler. He strongly objects to the importation of retired magistrates, useless deputy collectors and physically unfit colonels into the various departments of the State. Having a drop or two of the old 'blue blood' in his veins, he thinks that the Thakurs and Jagirdars of the State should be trained in the arts of administration and given the handling of industries, commerce, finance and the army. He feels confident that he or anyone else similarly educated, could handle agriculture better than the old Khan Saheb who thinks more of God and the next world, than of the poor peasants. He's naturally annoyed with the monopolies given to outsiders for cotton ginning and sugar manufacture. He's not far wrong when he says that there's a constant drain of money from the State. Ambitious and unscrupulous people from distant towns come over to Premnagar to harass the poor cultivator by fixing seasonal prices regardless of the current market conditions. He's passionately loyal to His Highness, and would prefer the affairs of the State in the hands of those who have a permanent stake in the land, and not in the hands of those who come here for three years at the tether end of their careers to reap a rich harvest for themselves. I'm neither a politician nor an administrator, (though I know all about horses and dogs), but I must admit that there's a good deal of

sound common sense in what he says."

"No sane person can disagree with what you've said just now," remarked Horatio Johnbull, in a thoughtful tone. Turning to Bachan Singh he added: "If you're convinced of the practical value of your plans, why don't you induce His Highness to overhaul the entire administration?"

"It's easier said than done, Mr. Johnbull," replied Bachan Singh. "You have no idea how complicated things are. His Highness himself is not disinclined towards reforms, though he doesn't care a damn as to what happens to posterity. Then again, it's not an easy task to turn a deaf ear to the policy indicated by the higher authorities. I really don't know what'll happen to these ancient states when the Indian Federation comes into being."

"My dear boy, don't get pessimistic," said Horatio Johnbull in a consoling voice. "Personally I'm inclined to believe that, in the long run, the affiliation of the Indian States to a central federation is bound to prove beneficial to all the federating members."

"Yes, I quite agree," answered Bachan Singh, "that, in the long run, things will adjust themselves for the mutual benefit of British India and Indian States. But my present contention is that, before we merge into a national constitution, we should put our own houses in order. Our people are backward, illiterate and desperately poor. Our administrators are self-seeking bumptious old idiots. Our customs are antediluvian and barbaric. As Rajputs, we are a decaying race. The old chivalry and heroism in the battlefield against heavy odds have almost disappeared. Our 'blue blood' is gradually turning into yellow blood. If we merge ourselves into a vast political pool, we shall disappear from the map of India before the end of the next generation."

"Now tell me frankly, Bachan Singh," enquired Horatio Johnbull, "what's the real cause of this racial decay? Any school-boy who has read Indian history

knows that the Rajputs fought brave battles even in the distant parts of Central Asia, and were practically invincible against the Mughal hordes. Why have they degenerated into puppet chieftains and mere figure heads?"

"It's a long story and the causes are many," replied Bachan Singh; "but the most important of all is unlimited sexual indulgence on the part of the princes. I suppose you know that in olden days, a Rajput warrior was allowed by custom and tradition to take a second, or even a third wife, if the first Maharani failed to bear a male child. The customary sanction became a rigid privilege in later years, and a good many Maharajas made a regular practice of unlimited polygamy. Some of them went so far as to extend their desires to all the pretty maid servants who came with the Maharanis as a necessary part of the parental dowry, and from time to time, added other concubines to their collection of harem women."

"Excuse my interrupting your very interesting talk," said Horatio Johnbull; "but I should like to know what happened to the children born by the concubines?"

"I can't answer this question without referring to the principles governing a Rajput marriage," answered Bachan Singh. "The central point of a legal marriage is the ceremony of the sacred fire. The bride and the bridegroom must walk around the holy fire seven times in the presence of priests, pundits, friends and relations to sanctify and legalise the union. A woman married in accordance with these rites is entitled to the position of a Maharani in the royal household, and her children are regarded as full-blooded princes and princesses. In the case of a maid servant (i. e., a Khavas), the Maharaja need not go through elaborate ceremonies. He may walk around the sacred fire, or even a Pipal tree only once and make her a temporary wife. In the case of ordinary mistresses (i. e., Pاسبان and Rakhats), the Maharaja may take a woman into the palace for

purposes of sexual amusement, and by giving her a gold anklet, he may confer upon her the rights of a married woman during his lifetime. The status of the children of the latter class depends entirely upon the influence which a Pasban is able to exercise over her lord and master. The fortunate ones are generally granted permanent revenues and maintenance allowances."

"Has there been further moral deterioration since the advent of the British rule?" enquired Horatio Johnbull.

"More than ever," replied Bachan Singh in a depressed voice. "The protection guaranteed by the British Government against external aggression and internal upheaval has been chiefly responsible for the unrestrained debauchery of the ruling princes. Having nothing to fear from their own people, some of them have committed brutal rapes in the name of 'divine destiny.' Others have squandered away huge fortunes in the brothels of Europe. The net result of unbridled sexual license and excessive drinking is that some of these 'divine' potentates become impotent at an early age and are unable to produce male heirs. All sorts of complications arise. Adoptions have to be ratified by the Paramount Power, and in some cases, successors have to be nominated. And this goes on even in the second quarter of the present century. There seems to be no effective solution of this wretched problem."

"Cheer up, Bachan, Old boy," said Jackie, who suddenly saw another side of the question under discussion. "Don't worry your little heart over these ancestral follies. Our Indian princes are not the only culprits. Old aristocratic families all over the world are spending away their energies in women and wine. And chivalry in its ancient sense is no longer a national asset. Modern rifles, machine-guns, aeroplanes and submarines, don't recognise the merits of fencing and swordsmanship. What you really want these days is stamina, and believe me, brandy, whisky and rum can easily supply the necessary courage to face all the



dangers of modern warfare."

Horatio Johnbull had understood the significance of every word of what Bachan Singh said about the degeneration of the Rajputs as a martial race. He paid no attention to Jackie's remarks about the ways of living of the aristocracy in other countries. He was thinking of the future possibilities of social reform.

"If great races have germs of real greatness in them, they never die out," he said philosophically. "They degenerate, but not to an irremediable extent. If a band of earnest young Rajputs like you were to start a Central Rajput Association with high ideals and lofty objects, you could easily recover the lost vigour and dignity of your race within a period of twenty years. You'll have to work hard. You'll have to discard old customs and eradicate moral corruption. You'll have to educate the younger generation in modern arts and sciences. You'll have to comply with the demands of social and sexual discipline. If you persist in your efforts, you'll achieve your objective; otherwise your warlike race will gradually disappear from the map of India, and its disappearance will be a great loss to the Empire."

"But who is going to finance the movement suggested by you?" asked Bachan Singh impatiently.

"I think your Maharaja would finance the movement, if you approached him in the proper manner and at the right moment. He's an enlightened prince, and I've no doubt that he's fully conscious of the dangers confronting the Rajput community as a whole."

"Many thanks for your valuable suggestion, Mr. Johnbull," said Bachan Singh. "I think I shall have a go at it."

"Friends! It's high time we made a move," shouted Jackie, "it's getting a bit chilly and we might as well go back to our cosy corners."

The small picnic party broke up before sunset. The Packard saloon resumed its homeward journey, and in less than fifty minutes, it left behind the flowered

terraces of the Rajeshwari Gardens 'and the barren fields of Premnagar.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### LORD ROCKBOTTOM BECOMES FRIVOLOUS

On Thursday, the 21st of January the weather became bitterly cold. Bleak winds from the low lying hills swept the plains, and dense clouds gathered over the capital of Premnagar State. There was an icy breath in the gale, and even the warmly-clad residents of Villa Marina felt the nip of the inclement weather and sought shelter in the cosy corners of the artificially heated Guest House. The poor people, as usual, went about their daily tasks in rags and tatters, shivering with cold, and shuddering at the merciless doings of an unknown divine power. The rich Marwaris moved about in thick woollen shawls, and after offering flowers and prayers to the mighty Shiva, went back to their shops to open their daily accounts and to cheat every humble borrower who came along to borrow small sums of money for defraying the unavoidable expenses of religious rituals and marriage ceremonies.

Sir David Diehard and his daughter, Cynthia, arrived in the morning, and were met at the railway station by Horatio Johnbull and the Reception Officer of the State. Cynthia's face was beaming with pleasure, and she looked more radiant than ever with the beautiful glow of youth. Horatio Johnbull was immeasurably happy to meet her after a prolonged absence. Every line of her body appealed to his admiring senses. Her kiss-provoking lips seemed rosier than the garden rose, and the freshness of her complexion was a miracle for a white woman in India. With renewed passion he beheld in her the ideal of his life.

After breakfast, Sir David retired to his room to go

through some urgent papers which he had brought with him from the Imperial City. Cynthia and Horatio Johnbull walked into the small music-room which was empty on that particular morning. She sat down on a small sofa placed against the wall, and he brought the music-stool nearer, and sat down, bending slightly, as if he were in a meditative mood.

Modestly and perhaps a little haltingly, he spoke: "Are you still fond of me?"

"More than ever," she replied unreservedly. "At eighteen a girl may fall in and out of love twice a week without feeling the least bit sorry for herself. But at twenty-five, she can't do that, for the simple reason that her sensitiveness is more lasting and real. I've reached that stage in life when love means something more to me than mere sex attraction. I've no use for the mad flirtations of early youth. I've been thinking about you and about myself, and the more I think of you, the more I cherish the memory of those few evenings we spent together in New Delhi."

"Cynthia, listen to me," said Horatio Johnbull in a whispering voice, "I'm not one of those sentimental blokes who make an everlasting hobby of love-making. I've seen life. I've met women of all sorts of social and moral grades, but I've never cared for anyone so deeply as I care for you. I couldn't express myself clearly in my brief and hurried letters to you. I felt your absence more and more keenly as I moved about in Calcutta society. Even on the telephone, I couldn't tell you all I wanted to say. But I'm sure, by this time, you're fully conscious of my deep-seated affection for you. I'm unequal to the task of making a conventional proposal, but if you think that the gulf between our ages is not likely to become a bar to your happiness, would you secure your father's approval to our marriage?"

"My dear sweet man," exclaimed Cynthia, "even if you had made your proposal in a more awkward fashion, I would have given you the same answer. I'll marry you in spite of the gulf between our respective

ages, and I'm sure father will be glad to give his approval. But we shall have to wait till next year when father goes home on leave preparatory to retirement."

"I'm certainly not in love with the last condition," said Horatio Johnbull somewhat sadly. "But of course I shall respect your wishes in the matter."

With these words a new bond of matrimony was sealed in the music-room of Villa Marina. In a truly imperial manner, Sir David Diehard gave his approval to his daughter's marriage to a distinguished member of the British Parliament. It was, however, agreed that the engagement should not be made public for some time, as the date of the marriage could not be fixed in advance for official reasons.

Six hours later, the large and spacious lounge of Villa Marina was converted into a comfortable and cosy tea-room. Soon after mid-day, the threatening clouds became active, and a steady downpour made it impossible for the visitors to keep their outdoor engagements. Captain Jackson, otherwise known as Jackie, was bitterly disappointed with the weather. He had made elaborate preparations for a special meeting of the Whippet Races, and had provided for a large number of events on the specially built track. The gods of the weather were against him and against the popular sport of which he was not only the pioneer, but an acknowledged leader in the whole country. By paying a small admission fee, anybody and everybody could go and witness horse racing; but only privileged persons could see whippet racing for which they must come to Premnagar, or go without the excitement of this matchless sport. When all chances of clear weather disappeared, Jackie hastened back to Villa Marina, and organised what he called an indoor social event for the benefit of His Highness's distinguished guests.

With his extraordinary skill in creating spectacular effects at a moment's notice, he rearranged the lounge with remarkable speed and dexterity. The grand piano was shifted from its own corner in the

music-room to a spacious corner in the lounge. Leather upholstered armchairs and highly-polished copper-topped tables were placed at convenient distances, and concealed electric lights were switched on to give the appearance of a specially organised "at home." All the guests were invited to spend the evening in the remodelled smoking lounge. The charming dancers and their "chaperon," the Austro-Italian architect were asked to make the evening lively, not only for themselves, but for all those who had been unexpectedly deprived of the joy of seeing the hounds finish their races.

In keeping with their dignity and official status, the residents of Villa Marina divided themselves into small groups before Jackie had time to shuffle them and to save them from self-inflicted boredom. Lt.-Col. Softhead, the rejuvenator of the Imperial troops, was smoking his seasoned pipe and enjoying a chat with Mr. Archibald A. Spender, who had spent a difficult day in impressing upon His Highness's Ministers the absolute and unqualified importance of Federation. Dewan Bahadur Sir Ananda Kumarswamy, who had also wasted considerable breath and brain on similar questions, was quietly listening to the "shoppy" talk of the Colonel. As these people were without a lady companion, Jackie shrewdly added Pamita to their company in order to liven their conversation up a bit.

Lord and Lady Rockbottom were seated at another table. They had got over their disappointment of missing the special meeting of the Whippet Racing Club, and of losing the opportunity of having a good bet on some of the tips previously passed on to them by Jackie. His Lordship was cheerfully discussing the latest scandal published in "*La Vie Parisienne*" with Marguerita. He was almost bursting with laughter when he repeated a vulgar joke to the charming dancer who could not however appreciate the humour of the situation described by His Lordship as "astoundingly amusing." Her Ladyship who was

known as the "Dainty Daisy" in her chorus days was having a mild flirtation with Gorio Vincenzi. She almost blushed when the latter paid her a glaring compliment about her beautifully formed ankles and legs in his Latin style.

After satisfying himself that the guests were not bored stiff, either with the weather, or with themselves, Jackie took a seat at the table occupied by Horatio Johnbull, Sir David Diehard and Cynthia. He had met Sir David several times before in the course of his official duties as entertainer-in-chief to His Highness the Maharaja of Premnagar, and also in his capacity as Secretary of the Whippet Racing Club; but he had never seen his beautiful daughter. Jackie had great regard and respect for the veteran police chief whom he regarded as one of the finest specimens of British dignity and integrity. "His Highness is very happy to know," he said in an ambassadorial style, "that you could find time to spend a week or so in his capital."

"I also am happy to get away from the routine of secretariat work," answered Sir David. "As a matter of fact, my daughter Cynthia and our old friend, Horatio, are partly responsible for my holiday. I must pay my respects to His Highness tomorrow, or the day after, whenever it's convenient for him to see me."

"You'll meet him at the banquet, Sir David," replied Jackie. "Mr. Spender is leaving for headquarters sometime next week, and His Highness is giving a small private banquet in his honour on Saturday."

"Captain Jackson," said Cynthia, interrupting the formal conversation. "I should love to attend a tiger shoot during my stay here. Is it possible to arrange one during the next few days?"

"I'm afraid I don't know much about tiger hunting myself, but Thakur Bachan Singh who's in charge of the State gardens and forests, told me yesterday that arrangements have been completed for a shoot in the

lower parts of the hills. I suppose they are now awaiting the appearance of the beasts. As soon as they get the news, they'll notify us and we shall make a dash for the final hunt. If you're lucky you might get an opportunity early next week."

Conversation drifted into other channels less terrifying than tiger hunting. The butler and the uniformed bar boys went round the tables with specially mixed cocktails. At this stage, Jackie realised that it was necessary to reshuffle the guests; otherwise there might be either too much hilarity or undue seriousness in the atmosphere of the lounge. He moved Lord Rockbottom from his table and placed him between Cynthia and Horatio Johnbull. He conducted Sir David Diehard to Mr. Spender's table, where the middle-aged civilian was still expounding his favourite political theories. He shifted Lt.-Col. Softhead and placed him next to the "Dainty Daisy." After completing these social duties, he sat down next to Lord Rockbottom at Cynthia's table.

Lord Rockbottom was in fine form. He had just finished his cocktail, and felt that he could easily swallow two more without losing his mental or physical equilibrium. He had discussed sex stuff with Marguerita, and told one or two smutty tales. And now he did not quite know how to broach fresh subjects in the presence of Cynthia Diehard, whom he had met for the first time. He was wondering whether he could confine himself successfully to the serious topics of the day.

"I say, old sport," he addressed Horatio Johnbull, "you're an incorrigible politician and slum-hunter. I hear you've been slumming and smelling things in the walled city. What on earth did you do that for?"

Horatio Johnbull was neither surprised nor shocked at this blunt question. He had met stupidity in titled people in his younger days. But Cynthia was nonplussed for a moment, as she did not expect familiarity from a man whom Horatio Johnbull had only just met.



"For the sake of obtaining first-hand knowledge of conditions in the walled city," replied Horatio Johnbull rather austere.

"By Jove!" said Lord Rockbottom, "you're a brave man. Personally I shouldn't care to swallow bacteria by the million."

"There's no question of swallowing bacteria by the dozen or by the million," retorted Horatio Johnbull indifferently. "Even you would agree with me that it is impossible to sympathise with the lot of the poor people, or to assist them in improving their conditions unless one sees their misery with one's own eyes."

"But why d'you want to improve their conditions of living?" enquired Lord Rockbottom peevishly. "They're happy and contented in their poverty. If I were in their position, I should certainly resent outside interference."

"You haven't known poverty, nor have you ever worried over your next meal. When a man doesn't know whether he's going to get a square meal the next day for himself and his children, he doesn't bother his head about personal pride, or even about outside interference."

"I'm damned if I understand your logic," His Lordship insisted. "There's a great deal too much of this socialistic bunkum in British India. Personally I should feel very happy if social reformers and politicians left Indian States alone."

"Indian States are an integral part of the Indian Empire. No honest politician in England or British India can leave them alone if he's sincerely anxious to lift the masses from their dire ignorance and poverty to a better kind of life."

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed Rockbottom, "I really don't know what you're driving at. There's enough Bolshie talk in Bombay and elsewhere about freedom and all that tommy rot. Why can't we have peace and happiness in the dominions of an Indian Maharaja whose internal sovereignty is guaranteed by the Paramount

Power? D'you realise, my friend, that Premnagar is one of the few places left in India, where an honest Englishman of birth and breeding can have a really good time? He can hunt and shoot tigers. He can dance and drink without being subjected to the evil eyes and tongues of the agitators. He can improve the administration without the bickerings of politicians. He can make a bit of honest money for himself without the jeers and sneers of elected ministers. I can't understand why an eminent M. P. like you should nose around, smelling poverty and disease everywhere. There are lots of charming ladies in Villa Marina. Take them out for a spin, dance the tango, show them elephant processions and make yourself likeable and useful. And let sleeping dogs lie."

"I didn't think you were so frivolous, Lord Rockbottom," said Horatio Johnbull cuttingly.

Jackie realised the gravity of the situation. He knew from past experience that any further latitude would make the noble lord the laughing-stock of the entire gathering. Without being noticed by anyone, he rose from his chair quietly, and gave his instructions promptly. Within a second, all lights were switched off, and a powerful spot-light was focussed on the centre of the lounge, where ample space had been left free for an oriental dance.

The attention of the visitors was thus distracted, for no one knew why the room had been suddenly plunged into darkness, and why only a spot-light had been focussed on the central arena. The visitors were so deeply engaged in either gossip or serious discussion that no one noticed Pamita slip away from her table on receiving a secret gesture from the master of ceremonies. During her prolonged stay in Premnagar, Pamita had been induced, persuaded and even commanded by His Highness to learn the well-known Marwari dance from a talented nautch girl who was a permanent member of the staff of State dancers and musicians. With her beautiful figure and musical temperament, she found

no difficulty in mastering not only the steps but also the ravishing gestures of the famous Indian dance. Jackie had already instructed her to dress for this dance at a particular moment. Within five minutes, she glided out of the cloakroom door into the middle of the floor, and commenced dancing to a melodious, rhythmic and well-timed tune produced by the radiogram installed behind the improvised stage.

Pamita was dressed in that particular Marwari style which suggests aggressive coquetry. To the Western mind, it was an overwhelming spectacle. The voluptuous display of quivering thighs under a thin overflowing Indian skirt, naked feet firmly held and bare ankles, six inches of ivory belly between the brassiere and the upper band of the skirt, breasts showing their pointed angles through laced cups—all there created a seductive scene for the audience. Pamita held the edges of the overflowing skirt in her outstretched hands. Her head was loosely covered with a piece of diaphanous silk. With a fiercely provocative smile on her dimpled face, and with a reckless abandon, she cried out, not in words, but in graceful motion: "Come to my arms." Gestures corresponded to the melody, and her whole voluptuous body swung round in semi-circles, bending and bowing to the visitors seated at different tables. It was a perfect dance, a masterpiece of the art of focussing the attention of an audience fixedly on a central theme.

When the Marwari dance was over, Lord Rock-bottom who had been struck dumb with this sudden and wonderful apparition, shouted out: "Bravo! Well done. What a marvellous performance!"

Cynthia Diehard had seen similar performances in Lucknow. She remarked casually: "Look out for the siren; she has been casting ravishing looks in your direction. She does look amazingly beautiful in that costume."

The others clapped their hands vigorously in appreciation. Jackie was also looking jubilant, as he

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had succeeded remarkably well in preventing a wordy duel between two of the guests and in finishing the evening with a social item which held the attention of every member of the audience.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE CEREMONIAL BANQUET

The ceremonial banquet organised for Saturday the 23rd of January, was perhaps the last official event of the social season in Premnagar. No pains were spared to make the function a brilliant success.

The state banqueting-hall and the large reception-room in the newly-constructed Nishat Palace were dazzlingly illuminated for the occasion. The arts of Western nations were united in perfecting the luxuries due to the ruling classes of a modern Indian State. The schemes of furnishing and decoration designed and executed by Gorio Vincenzi and his charming dancing companions did homage to the divine complacency of His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar.

Since even numbers were regarded as extremely unlucky by the superstitious pundits of the State, fifty-one guests were invited to the function. These included the full force of eleven distinguished resident visitors of Villa Marina and His Highness's two beautiful daughters whom Horatio Johnbull had met at the Charity Ball at New Delhi. Jackie Jackson was, of course, the master of ceremonies, and his amusing presence could not be dispensed with under any circumstances. Thakur Bachan Singh, in his capacity as an important official of the State, was in charge of introductions and presentations.

The Prime Minister and his ultra-modern and highly-sexed wife were followed by the European Finance Member and his ancient lady. The Revenue Member and the Minister for Law and Justice were unaccompanied by their respective spouses. The Army

Member being an old bachelor was alone with his military decorations and service medals. But the English Inspector General of Police, who had married a second time after his retirement from service in British India was there with his young Belgian bride, whose parents had settled down in London after the Great War. Herr Otto Stein, the German conductor of the royal orchestra arrived with his fascinating daughter. And then came Rao-Raja Rutubasant Singh, His Highness's Minister-in-waiting and Master of the Royal Household.

Business interests were also represented at the banquet by Raj-Ratna Lala Jaikisondas, the sugar monopolist, and Sheth Gijubhai Lalbhai, the holder of permanent concessions in cotton-ginning and pressing and the State Agent in Bombay.

In addition to all these officials and non-officials, there were nine hereditary Jagirdars and ten selected Sirdars, all of whom were entitled to wear gold anklets granted to them by the ruler, on all ceremonial occasions.

The press was represented by a well-informed and energetic reporter from Calcutta, and a smart young Indian journalist from the Imperial City. These two custodians of public enlightenment were there to see that no detail, however trivial, was left unreported, and that all the historical importance attached to the ruling family of Premnagar was duly cabled to their papers in glowing and flattering terms.

There was a lamentable shortage of ladies at the table. Neither the Senior Maharani nor the Junior Ranis could appear at a banquet of this nature. Khavases, Pasbans, concubines and other temporary mistresses were all collected behind the central gallery, so that, through diaphanous curtains, they could watch the proceedings of the evening and amuse themselves as best they could from that vantage-point.

The heir-apparent, who was known in the State as Tikka Sahib, could not be present since he was at the

moment receiving his education in one of those exclusive colleges in a distant part of India, which was earmarked for the cultural benefit of the sons and descendants of the ruling princes.

Most of the Europeans were dressed in full dress uniforms, with military and civil decorations shining resplendently on the breasts of the wearers. Medals and orders of the British Empire of all conceivable grades were visible as the guests started coming into the reception room at 8 p. m. sharp. The Indian nobles were conspicuous by their brilliant turbans and fully-buttoned long coats, with medals hung around their necks, or pinned to their coats. The majority of the State officials wore the special evening dress prescribed by His Highness for such functions, i.e., short black jackets buttoned up to the neck with white silk jodhpurs and evening shoes.

European ladies wore beautiful evening gowns and dainty pieces of jewellery matching the shades and colours of their dresses and shoes. The three Indian ladies wore gorgeous coloured saris bordered with gold brocades and trimmed with leaves embroidered in heavy silver thread. They wore studded gold bangles on their wrists and beautiful pearl necklaces and diamond pendants on their necks.

There was an atmosphere of restrained gaiety when His Highness entered the reception-room. With his tall and dignified appearance, he seemed to be a master of showmanship. Dressed in the full uniform of the Premnagar Highland Infantry, of which he was the Colonel-in-Chief, and decorated with all the orders of the Star of India, he walked from guest to guest and shook hands like a monarch who was born to command the respect of his friends and the homage of his ministers. In his generously hearty style he welcomed them to his palace, and with a patronising air, he enquired after their health and comforts.

The assembly of fifty-one persons, including the princely host, sat at the table in their respective places;

in the midst of modern splendour. They did unstinted justice to the lavish hospitality of their generous host. They chatted and talked. They drank the choicest wines of Italy, France, Austria and the Rhine Valley. They dined well and wisely, and eulogised the simple tastes and the utterly unselfish life of the ruler of Premnagar. They became jovial and free as the evening advanced, and enjoyed every moment of their stay in Nishat Palace.

At last His Highness rose from his chair, and after proposing and drinking the usual Imperial toast, began his speech in a studied and deliberate manner.

In well-chosen words, His Highness reiterated his faith in the justice and generosity of the Paramount Power. During the nineteen years of his reign, he said, he had displayed in no uncertain fashion his loyalty and devotion to the Crown. He could stand before the God of his forefathers and declare truthfully that steadfast loyalty and unflinching service had been his guiding principles of life. He had been fortunate in securing the services of able and experienced ministers, who had never hesitated to place their knowledge and experience at the disposal of his subjects. During the period of depression and low prices, he had willingly sanctioned the remissions of revenue, so as to give temporary relief to the cultivators. He stated with particular emphasis that he had spent vast sums of money from his privy purse in improving the livestock of the State and in perfecting the different breeds of race horses and hounds. During the course of his travels abroad, he had gathered considerable useful information on matters pertaining to administration and dictatorship and he hoped that, in years to come, he would be in a position to place all the available scientific and political facts at the free disposal of his people.

In a diplomatic and graceful manner, His Highness switched the subject of his speech from internal affairs to external politics. He impressed upon his audience the importance of Mr. Spender's visit and



told them that the subject of Federation was no longer one of secret diplomacy. Everyone knew that the major States like his own had already accepted the general principles governing the entry of the Indian states into an All-India Federation. They were now discussing the minor questions of finance and internal sovereignty of the rulers. He was glad, he said, to have in their midst, an officer of Mr. Spender's knowledge, experience and personal charm. The eminent representative of the Paramount Power had taken great pains to explain the complicated nature of the various provisions made in the New Federal Constitution to his Prime Minister and Finance Member. He was happy to announce that, with unqualified goodwill on both sides, almost all the obstacles had now been removed by the determined and selfless efforts of Mr. Spender and his own ministers and advisers. He was grateful to the honourable gentleman for his boundless enthusiasm, his unstinted co-operation and his undoubted sincerity.

Mr. Archibald A. Spender had already prepared himself for this great occasion. As soon as cheers and applause were finished, he rose from his chair, and after addressing His Highness first, faced the audience and began his speech.

He congratulated His Highness on his successive achievements in the fields of finance and administration. Within a brief period of nineteen years, the lofty ruler of Premnagar had changed the very face of things, and through personal attention and careful handling, had accumulated large financial reserves. He had built palaces for himself; but he had also built parks for the people. Under his inspiring guidance, hospitals, schools and colleges had been established for the benefit of state subjects. Through the agency of the Central Demonstration Farm, His Highness had improved the cultivation of cotton and sugar-cane, and was now on the point of introducing several other commercial crops in the State. The Paramount Power was genuinely proud of all these achievements, which Mr. Spender

said, must ultimately lead to a substantial improvement in the economic conditions of the people. Cemented roads and metalled thoroughfares, gardens and public buildings could be used even by the humblest citizen of Premnagar. The State Bank had been established for the purpose of offering credit facilities to both money-lenders and village borrowers. Although His Highness's personal deposits in the bank earned only a small rate of interest, he was nevertheless happy to feel that his own money was being circulated for the financial welfare of his people.

Mr. Spender thanked the Maharaja for his unremitting courtesy, and paid a glowing tribute to his outstanding personality. He further added that the ruler of the great dominion of Premnagar had endeared himself, not only to his subjects, but also to all the British officials and foreign guests who came into personal contact with him. The traditional loyalty of the house of Premnagar had made itself felt throughout the length and breadth of the British Empire. He was glad to be able to say that the ruler, his ministers and his adviser, Dewan Bahadur Sir Ananda had all approached the various problems involved in the Federal Scheme with a remarkable clarity of vision and broad-mindedness. His task was made much easier by the constant personal attention paid to all the details of the scheme by the great legal luminary of South India. He congratulated His Highness's Government on the expedition with which they had carried out their difficult task and made momentous decisions concerning the future prestige of the royal family and the economic welfare of the vast population of the State. With a final dramatic touch he requested the ladies and gentlemen present to rise and drink to the health and long life of their princely host.

The two press reporters were furiously engaged in taking down shorthand notes of the speeches. They did not miss a single word of what was said by the leading speakers of the evening. They had obviously

made up their minds to give the world a dazzling pen picture of the historical event staged in Premnagar in honour of the Federal Scheme.

Horatio Johnbull was amused with certain expressions used by the Maharaja and the honoured guest of the evening. He knew, for instance, that even if the cultivators in certain barren and rainless areas were tortured to death, they could not pay the land revenue and taxes due to the state. He was fully aware of the fact that the money deposited by His Highness in the State Bank was only a fraction of what he had looted in different civilised ways from his own people and extorted from those to whom he had sold concessions and monopolies. He was conscious that under the thin veneer of Western culture and much-advertised generosity, there was a brutal heart which feared neither God nor man and indulged in all sorts of sexual excesses in the name of divine privilege. He could see that the continued reiteration and recital of the prose and verse of loyalty and devotion was a blind for the agents of the Paramount Power and a lullaby for the naughty children of imperialism. He listened patiently and attentively to the exchange of congratulations and adulations, and smiled meaningly across the table to Cynthia.

The ceremonial banquet ended as gloriously and successfully as it began. On the third day, through the miracle of wireless telegraphy, the world was given a glowing account of the most wonderful achievements of His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar, and of the most successful handling of the delicate questions of Federation by Mr. Archibald A. Spender.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### ARISTOCRACY AT CLOSE QUARTERS

The caressing warmth of soft sunshine returned on Monday morning. The bitterly cold winter rain departed from the plains of Premnagar, and with it departed the staunch champion of the Federal Scheme—Mr. Archibald A. Spender who took more than twenty-four hours to get over the after-effects of his remarkably well-worded and smoothly delivered speech of Saturday night. The tension of Federation was nearly over, or at any rate, it was considerably reduced by the sudden departure of the official missionary.

Villa Marina, its terraced garden and its flowering trees looked beautifully clean after the rain. The resident visitors of the princely Guest House also felt more optimistic about the success of the coming social events. The "Dainty Daisy" was again full of spirits, and her worthy husband was looking forward to the early approach of the sporting season. Horatio Johnbull was also in the best of moods. Sir David Diehard had disregarded the merciless weather, and despite Cynthia's warning, had indulged in his favourite hobby—long and lonely walks in lonely pastures.

In Premnagar, there was always something to do for those who had ordinarily nothing to do. And even when things were dull and colourless and there was really nothing to do, the constructive genius of Jackie Jackson came into play, and something or other was improvised for the banishment of boredom. Being highly sensitive to the emotional needs of the fair sex, he was always on the look-out for something really exciting. On Monday afternoon, he could find nothing

better than a spectacular meeting of the Whippet Racing Club, and true to his habitual enthusiasm and chivalry, he dragged all the guests of Villa Marina to the newly built race-track.

Viewed from the angle of aristocratic idiosyncrasy, the race meeting was a thundering success. Everybody was amused, for everybody had a few small stakes on the races. Thakurs and Jagirdars, being invariably free from mental and manual occupations, had gathered in great strength. Betting and book-making were brisk, and many a silver coin changed hands during the course of the afternoon. His Highness had also been persuaded to attend the meeting. In order to impress his divine dignity and position on the minds of the punters, he arrived at the track, mounted on a richly caparisoned and gaily painted elephant. With a clean-shaven face and a richly-turbaned head, he presented a majestic figure as he descended from his gold-plated and silver-lined Howdah. In the costume of an independent Indian ruler and with his superficial veneer of Western mannerism, he moved about freely and gracefully among his guests, and even condescended to indulge in mild betting on a favourite thoroughbred hound. The afternoon ended in the Racecourse Pavilion, where tea and other refreshments were served to the guests and to the local gentry.

In the evening, Jackie rushed into the smoking lounge of Villa Marina in breathless haste and announced the arrival of four members of the All-India princely fraternity. In a truly oriental fashion, he praised the distinguishing characteristics of each of these potentates, and extolled their sporting qualities and unconventional habits. He said that the brother princes were paying a surprise visit to Premnagar, and as a mark of brotherly affection for His Highness, they had dropped the usual formalities of an official invitation. He requested the European guests, one and all, to come to the Victoria Memorial Club (otherwise known as the "VIM") on the following evening to meet their Highnesses, the

divine guests who had chosen to visit the capital at a very opportune moment. Although the official season was nearing its end, the social events would have to go on for some time in view of the sudden arrival of the divinely aristocratic gentlemen. Everything would, of course, be informal, as Their Highnesses loathed the cumbersome etiquette of formal dinner parties and receptions.

The Victoria Memorial Club was the leisure resort of the royalty, gentry and upper middle-class officials of Premnagar. It was not like a suburban club in a suburban town in England, nor like one of the gilded and double-storeyed residential and sporting clubs in a cosmopolitan town in India. It was something totally different. It was a gift of His Highness to the royal family and to his people, and was built at the expense of the privy purse as a belated memorial to the officers of His Highness's Highland Infantry who lost their noble lives in the service of the Empire in some great war. It was a house of comfort, a rendezvous of sport, a centre of recreation and an incomparable place for entertainment and amusement. Within its expansive boundary walls was situated the cricket stadium, one of the finest of its kind in the whole of India. It was also the central exchange of social gossip, scandal and political talk. In short, it was the most visible monument of His Highness's supreme generosity.

Almost all the rooms in the VIM were spacious, airy, well-ventilated and sunny. The finest wines, the most complicated cocktails, highly-matured spirits and expensive sports, were all available at the Club House. There were ladies' dressing-rooms and gentlemen's bath-rooms with sunk-in marble tubs and mechanical showers. There were wide verandas tiled with multi-coloured cement blocks, and a long glass-roofed lounge faced the ornamental lawn which was a real picture of horticultural perfection.

On Tuesday evening, there was a steady babble of talk and laughter in the Club House. The card-room

was crowded with ten tables, and forty pensive figures were brooding over their cards. Auction bridge was still in vogue in Premnagar. The more reckless, and to a certain extent, spectacular type commonly known as "contract bridge" was not played extensively by the officials and Sirdars of the State. The billiards-room was also busy. His Highness, the Raja of Vasantnagar and his Private Secretary, an England-returned Punjabi youth, were playing against Principal Bangopadya of Maharaja's College and Thakur Bachan Singh. Barring the occasional tick-tick of ivory balls, there was complete silence in this room. The spectators sitting on mounted seats were enjoying the skilled display of the Principal, who was a well-known mathematician in India.

The huge drawing-room facing the tennis courts at the back of the Club House was also fully occupied. In one corner, Lady Rockbottom was chatting with a superior looking A. D. C. of His Highness's personal staff. Not far from her table, Marguerita and Pamita were discussing the attractions of the recent arrivals, that is, their personal charms and their possible vigour. Sir David Diehard and Cynthia were seated at another table, and were commenting on the beauty spots of Premnagar with the Finance Member and his aged wife. At a large table placed between a cushioned sofa and the fireplace sat Horatio Johnbull in intimate conversation with Their Highnesses of Aminabad, Suriyanagar and Krishnapur. Dewan Bahadur Sir Ananda Kumar-swamy, the world renowned authority on constitutional law and history, was sitting in the midst of a batch of young and admirably educated Jagirdars, and was carefully listening to smutty stories and appetising limericks. He was almost bursting with riotous laughter over the third line of the popular limerick:

There was a young man of 'Pindi,  
who had a dis-reputable shindy—etc. etc. "

Jackie Jackson was having fits and bursts of hospitality. He kept marching from room to room,

enquiring if the distinguished guests wanted any drinks.

The young Nawab of Aminabad was barely thirty years of age. Typically Mughal in his looks, he had a fine stature and a well-developed body. His frequent travels in Western countries had given him an air of modern nonchalance; but hereditary and early training had placed such heavy religious burdens on his mind that he was unable to look upon any faith other than Islam with a charitable broadmindedness. He was, however, a member of the princely order, and as such, was always fervently zealous in his wish to protect the name and fame of his brother princes, irrespective of caste or creed. He was impressed with Horatio Johnbull's unassuming and unpretentious personality. Without formal preliminaries or conventional apologies, he was discussing with him the tenets of Islam affecting matrimony and the position of women in society. He had novel views of his own on the subject of polygamy. Regardless of the origin of the system of multiple marriages, he was impetuously giving Horatio Johnbull the benefit of his theories and reflections.

"You see, Mr. Johnbull," he said in his bookish style, "just as there are tremendous variations in the physical and mental characteristics of men, similarly there are vast differences in women. Some of them are fit only for the noble function of motherhood: others make excellent bed companions. There are others who are exceptionally competent in the science of domestic economy, and in keeping a vigilant eye on the household budget. And then there are others who adorn any society in which they move with their brilliant physical and intellectual presence. Those of us who can afford, and most of us can, marry four wives in accordance with the maximum limit prescribed by the Islamic law."

"But I'm sure," insisted Horatio Johnbull, "that the Islamic law doesn't enforce multiple marriages. It simply places a maximum limit on the possible number."

"It certainly does not enforce polygamy," answered



the Young Nawab, "but it does enjoin us to avoid sinful intercourse."

"I can't see how it can prevent illicit and promiscuous indulgence," said Horatio Johnbull.

"It can," replied the ardent advocate of polygamy. "In your own country, Mr. Johnbull," he continued, "and also in the majority of Western countries that I have visited, young men lead a polygamous life till they have exhausted their curiosity, and in certain cases, their capacity. When they have gained sufficient experience of the ways and moods of women, they embark upon matrimony and lead a monogamous life. In the eyes of the church and the law, they are good Christian citizens capable of leaving behind healthy Christian progeny. But they may have already produced a crop of illegitimate urchins and may have, consciously or unconsciously, ruined many a virgin. In our case, we start our lives with monogamy and go on adding wives, up to a maximum of four, as and when our financial means and social status permit. We do not leave behind a crop of bastards in the early days of youth. Personally I feel certain that our system is more moral than yours in the long run."

"But how can you possibly love four women at the same time?" enquired Horatio Johnbull in a questioning voice.

"We don't," answered the young Nawab. "We just allot them certain economic and domestic functions and carry on our lives merrily and smoothly. Equal treatment for all and hence no jealousy."

"I am afraid that's not my conception of married love," observed Horatio Johnbull in a downright manner.

"I am sorry you do not agree with me," retorted the Nawab. "Since we are having a frank discussion, I might as well be perfectly plain. In my opinion, love in its last analysis, is only a mental phase and passes away like all fantasies; except in the case of romantic lovers, who either kill themselves in trying to achieve

an imaginary ideal, or give up their struggles and lead the ordinary humdrum everyday life and die like the rest of us as normal human beings."

Horatio Johnbull was perturbed and annoyed with this peculiar philosophy of love and marriage. He was, however, still determined to secure a victory for his own views on the subject. He turned towards his right, and addressing His Highness, the Maharaja of Suriyanagar, enquired: "You've just heard Aminabad's views on matrimony. What's your personal opinion about the system of multiple marriages?"

His Highness of Suriyanagar was an acknowledged voluptuary and a trained sensualist. He was known to have beaten all records at the early age of thirty-five. He felt flattered by Horatio Johnbull's personal enquiry, and wanted to be precisely frank in his answer.

"Thank the Lord for His little mercies!" he said in a biblical strain. "Our religion imposes no limitation on the number of marriages, or on the keeping of charming mistresses. We can legally marry an indefinite number of wives, and we do so in actual practice—till such time as old age imposes its cruel disabilities upon our system."

"What d'you do when your body refuses to function, and your mind insists?" asked Horatio Johnbull out of sheer curiosity.

"We simply resort to aphrodisiacs recommended and prescribed by our Hakims and learned physicians," answered the Maharaja. "But if by any chance, even the drugs and the metallic oxides fail, then we adopt various perversions. But of course, the latter stage doesn't arrive till we are well on the high road to eternity."

"I don't know much about your Hakims and their drugs, but I shouldn't think you would gain much by resorting to artificial methods of stimulation," said Horatio Johnbull.

"I am sorry to have to say," replied Suriyanagar, "that you Europeans think that Voronoff and Steinach

are the only names in the science of rejuvenation. You haven't come across the wonderful miracles performed by our Hakims almost every day in this line. By some magical process known only to a few, they can convert gold, silver, copper, pearls, diamonds, and even emeralds into ashes. These ashes are mixed in fresh honey and given to those who are in need of rejuvenation. But mark my words, Mr. Johnbull—although the quantity given is infinitely small, the results obtained are amazingly wonderful. You feel a different man after a week's treatment. Your desires are reawakened and your faculties restored beyond human belief."

Horatio Johnbull was trying to visualise an old man of seventy becoming youthful and sexually potent by the internal use of ashes and honey, or what the Maharaja of Suriyanagar described as *Kushtas*. He remained silent, but Suriyanagar, who had not yet emptied his head of medical trash, continued his talk in a scholarly manner.

"Mind you," he said, "personally, I do not believe in the use of *Kushtas* and herbs; unless, of course, one is forced by unexpected circumstances. I think the method devised by our host, Premnagar, is extraordinarily efficacious. He maintains a large number of depots all over the hills, where young presentable girls of tender age are collected and fattened up like hens and turkeys. When they are ready, they are transferred to a central depot for his final inspection and selection. And the chosen ones are finally deposited in the new palace. Frequent contact with youthful maidens enables him to maintain his youthful vigour. The only trouble about this method is that it is darned expensive. In addition to the compensation paid to the parents, the brokers have to be paid large sums of money for keeping their watery mouths closed for ever. With a proper financial back-ground, I think Premnagar's method is admirably suited for the purpose of rejuvenation." \*

"I think\*it's a disgustingly crude and inhuman method," remarked Horatio Johnbull.

His Highness of Krishnapur was listening to this futile discussion in a half-hearted manner. He had his own worries; unbearably more burdensome than impotency and rejuvenation. In spite of his ancient ancestry and his Chandravanshi origin, he was entitled to a salute of nine guns only. In his own mind, he was convinced that his status demanded at least fifteen guns. Some stupid and careless British official was probably responsible for this unpardonable shortage of guns. He was rightly annoyed with the "whole damned lot," and was not in a mood to forgive even a distinguished member of the British Parliament for the sinful action of a single member of his careless race. He had been brutally, even criminally ignored in the last Honours List, with the result that, he was now miserably short of the necessary letters of the alphabet. They might have added a Star of India, or something equally dignified to his family name. But as usual, they were incorrigibly lazy and indifferent to the needs of his ancestral honour. He was unavoidably short of funds, and no one in the Department for the Protection and Preservation of Princely India cared two hoots about his financial sufferings. His little railway was heavily mortgaged with a British bank and his personal jewels were pawned with a Marwari cotton speculator. Did anyone in the Government raise his little finger to assist him in redeeming his properties? No! They simply put further obstacles in the way of his borrowing sufficient funds to feel free from the wretched financial bondage. What did he care about Johnbills and their prattle? He was terribly, most frightfully worried about his own affairs, and was seeking, at least mentally, the most suitable avenues of approaching his host for a small loan of thirty lacs. He was not in a mood to participate in useless discussions on sex and marriage.

But the processes of his annoyance and self-com-miseration were rudely disturbed by the arrival at the table of His Highness, the Raja of Vasantnagar, who had just finished a long game of billiards against the

learned mathematician. Standing at the back of the sofa, and placing his right hand on Aminabad's shoulder, he shouted: "Hullo! You are still talking about women and their inscrutable ways. You have more patience with the opposite sex than I have."

Aminabad made room for him at the table and ordered a whisky and soda. Horatio Johnbull shook hands with him across the table and offered him an Egyptian cigarette. Suriyanagar touched his forehead with his right hand and gave him a friendly smile. Krishnapur remained sulkily silent.

Vasantnagar was a renowned sex pervert. His unequalled reputation in homosexuality was known not only in India, but also in Berlin and Bucharest. It was a matter of pride for him to declare boastfully that even the most desirable virgin in his State was safe from molestation. He was philosophically inclined to accept his practices as natural and normal events in the sex life of human beings. Being well read and well informed, he could prove the biological basis and the physiological need of the homosexual urge in human nature. He was surprised that any civilised Government in the world should find it necessary to legislate against what he called a perfectly normal and healthy desire. Unfortunately he was compelled by existing social conventions to refrain from making a public exhibition of his conviction and practices. If he were socially and legally free, he would make those practices an unfettered sex institution within his own dominions.

With an air of amiable sociability, His Highness of Vasantnagar spoke to Horatio Johnbull, after he had gulped down his whisky and soda. "I hope," he said, "that our friend Yusaf of Aminabad has not been boring you with his wonderful theory about the indispensability of four wives."

"Not at all," replied Horatio Johnbull with some show of disgust. After a few moments, he changed his attitude and said: "Standing as we are at the two opposite ends of the social rod, we can't possibly agree on

fundamentals. I wonder whether you also take the same view on the position of women in society?"

"I hold no views whatsoever," replied Vasantnagar quickly and frankly. "I am not susceptible to the trigonometrical beauty of women. I have no use for the contours of hills and valleys in the female figure. I see endless possibilities in the plains of the male form. Moreover, my dear Johnbull, I couldn't possibly stand the intrigue, the corruption, and the heart-burning jealousies that must result from the acquisition of women by unfair and illegal means. Murder and arson, blackmail and brutality are common occurrences in our lust-infected towns. I would rather lead a life of peaceful perversion than endanger my very existence, both mental and physical, by surrounding myself with a bunch of intriguing women."

"You can't possibly lead a peaceful life by violating the laws of nature," commented Horatio Johnbull.

"By resorting to the use of the word 'nature,' I am afraid you will land yourself in the quagmire of ethical controversy," observed His Highness of Vasantnagar. And then suddenly he became wise and continued his argument in a different form. "At this very moment, we are all living an unnatural life. We are defying the elements. In our desire to attain perfection in the scientific world, we are making endless efforts to conquer the brutal domination of nature. Modern civilisation itself is nothing but a bold defiance of all that nature has proclaimed to be unfathomable and unconquerable. How can you expect me, a finished product of the civilisation you cherish and admire, or anyone else of my kind, to conform to the laws of nature?"

"I'm afraid you've misunderstood the meaning of my remarks," said Horatio Johnbull, in reply to this learned but somewhat elementary statement.

Fortunately for all concerned, the discussion came to an abrupt end, when Jackie announced in his usual diplomatic manner that the ladies were anxious to get back to Villa Marina. The evening was also getting

chillier, and the various topics of conversation at the different tables were becoming lifeless and boring. Horatio Johnbull rose from his chair, and after wishing good-night to Their Highnesses, left the Victoria Memorial Club in the company of Cynthia and Sir David Diehard.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE TIGER HUNT

"Don't be a fool, Dick. And don't try your African stunts in Premnagar," said Lady Rockbottom, addressing her husband in reference to the tiger hunt, preparations for which were being made on a princely scale. "It wouldn't be so bad," she continued with a mercenary look on her face, "if you left behind a widow with ten thousand a year; but with a paltry three thousand I should hate the idea of going back to the stage."

"My darling girl, don't anticipate difficulties before things actually happen," replied His Lordship assuringly and affectionately. "In the first place, I've no intention of getting mauled by a tiger, or a panther, or any of those ferocious animals, and in the second place, tomorrow morning's expedition is only a preliminary reconnaissance designed by Jackie and Bachan Singh to complete the final arrangements for Friday night."

"But my dear man, you're not used to riding elephants with only a thick mattress to sit on. I'm sure you won't be able to balance your body on the elephant's back. And if by any chance you do, you won't handle your rifle properly at the right moment."

"Once again, Daisy darling, there's no sense in anticipating difficulties," assured Lord Rockbottom, in a tone, full of courage, sympathy and affection, "Bachan Singh was not very keen on taking me out, but I insisted on having this jolly ride tomorrow morning. We start off by car at 4 a.m., reach the foot of the hills before 5, and commence our little expedition at 5.30. After inspecting the *machan's* and assuring ourselves of the adequacy of the arrangements



and positions fixed by the Shikaris, we return to the camp at about 9.30 for breakfast. If all goes well, and I don't see why it shouldn't, I shall be with you before lunch time."

Jackie's protests were of no avail, and Bachan Singh's threatening picture of the hidden dangers of the thick forest remained unheeded. Having heard that a goat had been mauled to death by a tiger during the night, His Lordship simply insisted upon accompanying the reconnaissance party. In support of his determination, he related some of his hunting exploits in Africa to Jackie, and with his usual swaggering air, enlarged upon his heroic feat of saving a nigger boy from the very jaws of death. With his express rifle, he said, he could tackle any job that flung itself on him in a sudden and unexpected fashion. It was no use arguing with His Lordship. They had to accept him as a third companion, in addition to the *Mahavat* who must necessarily lead the party through the likely areas.

At 5 a.m. sharp on the following day, the party ascended the popular female elephant named Hastini, reserved by the Superintendent of the Royal Stables for dangerous and adventurous expeditions, and took seats on the mattress tied firmly and squarely on her spacious back. Although Jackie was neither an expert Shikari, nor a trained elephant rider, he had the advantage of previous experience and strong nerve. Both Bachan Singh and he settled down comfortably and synchronised their own jolting movement with the slow and steady march of the elephant; but Lord Rockbottom took considerable time in adjusting himself to the movements of the huge animal. At one time, he thought he might slip off the beastly mattress; but a useful hint from Bachan Singh about the adjustment of personal balance saved the situation.

Sitaban was one of those thickly-wooded forests where only trained elephants and tried Shikaris could find their bearings. It was intersected by several

shallow streams and rapidly moving nullahs. Here and there trees had been felled by the Forest Department and open spaces made available for temporary camps and hunting parties. Hastini moved on, at first slowly and then rapidly, and gave Jackie and Bachan Singh occasional opportunities of inspecting the system of *machans* constructed for the forthcoming hunting party. Goats had also been tied to the trunks of forest trees at regular intervals, and the beaters had fixed their own positions for encircling the animals in a sort of semi-circular enclosure. Camping arrangements had also been completed, and as far as possible, every detail had been attended to by the Shikaris and their assistants in making the hunt an unqualified success.

For two hours, Hastini jogged along the bye-paths of the thickly-wooded forest. Just as the shimmering rays of the morning sun gleamed through the foliage, she suddenly halted in front of a small hill stream, which was almost dry at that time of the year. A natural instinct, or perhaps the smell of sudden danger warned her of the nearness of the enemy, the panther. The wagging of the long flopping ears and the sudden turning of the head gave the *Mahavat* and the two officers sufficient indication of the coming danger.

His Lordship was unaware of Hastini's habits, nor did he know that jungle panthers were always courteous enough to give the hunters a timely warning. He shouted out: "Hullo, what's the matter now?" Before he had finished the rest of the sentence, a huge panther pounced upon the posterior of the elephant.

It was a critical moment. His Lordship covered his eyes with the palms of his hands. His whole body shook with fear. He lost his jovial and swaggering mien, and in an agonising state of mind, soiled his riding breeches like a child under extreme emotional fear. Bachan Singh realised the gravity of the situation within a flash, lifted His Lordship's express rifle and shot the panther before it had time to maul the elephant or to tear away His Lordship's leg. The panther

howled with pain and then dropped dead on the rugged ground, with streams of blood spurting out of his wounded stomach.

"By Jove! It was a narrow escape," said His Lordship after he had recovered from the sudden shock of seeing the furiously shining eyes of the uninvited panther.

Jackie was partly amused and partly sarcastic. "But for Bachan's timely shot," he said, "Her ladyship would have missed you for lunch, and His Highness would have lost his constant companion."

"You might have warned me against the sudden attacks of these beastly panthers," was all that His Lordship said at the moment.

Lord Rockbottom presented himself at the table, immaculately dressed in a blue lounge suit, earlier than his usual lunch time. He was looking perfectly fit and happy. By a mysteriously scientific process of toilet, he had managed to remove every trace of the fear left on his fine features by the morning incident. Lady Rockbottom was still powdering her nose and massaging her beautifully shaped neck with a specially devised rubber roller. Lt.-Col. William Softhead had just popped into the dining-room to enquire if the arrangements for the tiger hunt had been duly completed. Sir David Diehard, Cynthia and Horatio Johnbull were also eagerly awaiting the latest news of the forthcoming hunt. Everyone was anxious to know how things were going on?

On seeing Rockbottom, the Colonel laughed his usual meaningless laugh. "Hullo! old sport, you've already come back," he said, "what about a spot of gin and bitters before lunch?"

"I'm for a long drink at this time of the day," answered Lord Rockbottom. "Good beer keeps the body fit for sport."

"Talking about sport," observed the sleepy Colonel, "reminds me of your early morning visit to the forest. How did you fare in your first attempt?"

"What d'you mean by my first attempt?" asked His Lordship in a manner which suggested that he was "amazingly" annoyed with this insolent question. "There was no first attempt, nor any other attempt. We simply rode into the forest to see that all those *machans* for the hunting party were in readiness. During our inspection, we sighted a panther and bagged it. There you are, that's the end of the story."

"Shabash!" shouted the Colonel vigorously, when Lady Rockbottom made an appearance at the table. Addressing her husband, she said: "I'm glad to see you alive, darling. I was getting uneasy, and I couldn't possibly get out of bed till after eleven. Now that you've bagged a panther, the only unseen danger in the forest, we shall all have a jolly good time watching the tigers being shot by the dozen. What sayest thou, sweetheart?"

"I never object to good sport, even in the case of women," answered the darling husband; "but I'm afraid we've removed only one of the unseen dangers of the forest. There may be others. Who knows?"

"But honey dear," said Lady Rockbottom, adopting the American style of endearment, "you're so brave and chivalrous. Why should we fear the unseen dangers? We girls can place ourselves in your hands without the slightest fear of being mauled by a tiger. The chorus girls in my old show will have the biggest laugh of their lives when they hear of my hunting exploits." Then, with a loud sigh; "Oh dear, dear, dear; what an excitement for the stage!"

Further conversation on the subject of the first attempt and the dramatic shooting of the panther was deliberately postponed by His Lordship when Jackie appeared in the dining-room. After the mid-day meal was finished, Jackie gave elaborate instructions to those who had gathered around him to hear the news of the forthcoming hunt. With the aid of a detailed sketch, he showed them their respective positions in the *machans*, and indicated the directions and approaches

of the forest from which the tigers might be expected. He gave a definite number to each gun of the party, and explained to them the functions of the beaters' shots, and also the importance of shooting in accordance with a pre-conceived plan. Since more than one goat had been killed, it was possible that there were several tigers roaming about in the forest.

It was indeed a splendid opportunity for the guests to display their shooting talents. They would be accompanied by tried Shikaris, but all the same, they should not, under any circumstances, lose their nerves, or else, they might unconsciously cause danger to others. Jackie further informed them that His Highness was definitely opposed to the presence of the ladies in the *machans*, but if they insisted on participating in the hunt, they would undertake the journey, bear the hardships and suffer the shocks with their eyes open, and without making unnecessary fuss. To the last condition, all the four ladies agreed, for they would rather die than give up such a fine opportunity of having a really exciting time.

Friday night was an important night for the visitors of Villa Marina, and also for the four princely guests who had thrust themselves on the hospitality of His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar. It was a calm though chilly night with a starspangled sky and a softly shining moon.

The tiger hunt began just before midnight. It was a stagc-managed show, like any other hunt organised by Indian princes for the amusement of their European and American guests. There was some similarity to one of those scenes which are usually advertised on publicity placards on Indian railway stations, showing the anxiously awaiting hunter in a lofty *machan*, with a rifle resting on a projecting bamboo parapet.

The entire party, consisting of fifteen members, was divided into small batches of three in the high pitched *machans*. They were supported, protected, assisted and directed by highly-trained Shikaris who kept their

eyes and ears open in the rustling stillness of the forest. They couldn't possibly miss the tiger if the hungry beast returned within their range for his mauled goat carcase, nor could the animal pounce upon them as they were carefully guarded by rifles and experienced beaters. One by one, four tigers and panthers were driven into the semi-circular enclosure arranged by the officers of the Forest Department, and one by one, they were shot by the *Machan* hunters, without mercy and without need for fear. The only annoying feature of the whole game was that the poor dear girls had to wait so long in the cold night for the appearance of the animals. But for the excitement of big game hunting they would have preferred their cosy beds to the startling noise of gunfire.

Out of sheer curiosity, Cynthia actually shot a tiger with her own hands. The "Dainty Daisy" had to take off her diamond rings to handle the heavy rifle, but the Shikari who was protecting her against all untoward incidents, made her aim at the animal at the crucial moment. Horatio Johnbull was lazy and did not want to shoot a man-eater under the favourable conditions of his guarded position. Sir David Diehard was an inveterate hunter, and although this mollicoddle business of a *machan* was against the grain, he shot a panther to oblige Pamita who was passionately fond of panther skins. The third tiger was shot by Lord Rockbottom, who thus succeeded in impressing his bravery, valour and fearlessness in the midst of extreme danger on Marguerita. The fourth tiger and the second panther were shot simultaneously by two shots from a distant *machan* occupied by Their Highnesses of Aminabad and Suriyanagar.

Dewan Bahadur Ananda Kumarswamy and Gorio Vincenzi were both snoring their innocent snores, in their quilted beds in Villa Marina, when the hunting party returned from their hunting exploits in the Sitaban forest at six in the morning.

And as usual, in due course, it was announced in

the daily press that, Lord Rockbottom, the celebrated big game hunter of East African fame, and his party had bagged six tigers and two panthers in the dangerous forests of Premnagar. Even photographs of the unfortunate animals and of the fortunate hunters appeared under glowing headlines in the illustrated weeklies of India.

And thus ended the brilliant story of a perfectly glorious night of hunting exploits in the dominions of His Highness, the Maharaja of Premnagar.

## CHAPTER XXX

### REFLECTIONS

For Horatio Johnbull, Villa Marina became suddenly very lonely on Sunday morning. Sir David Diehard and Cynthia left for Delhi by an early morning train. The gap created by the departure of his beautiful fiancée could be filled neither by the winning smiles of the "Dainty Daisy," nor by the amorous advances and loving glances of the Austrian dancers. He felt depressed and miserable at first, and then decided to utilise the temporary separation for constructive work.

In the afternoon, Lt.-Col. William Softhead also took leave of his princely host and left for a neighbouring state, where he had to assure himself that the tailors entrusted with the important task of turning out uniforms for the cavalry, were doing their duty honestly and diligently. In his military manner he said good-bye to everybody, and even kissed the hands of Lady Rockbottom, Marguerita and Pamita as a token of regard for their delightful company. He promised to look up Horatio Johnbull at the House of Commons during his next home leave.

Dewan Bahadur Sir Ananda Kumarswamy left for Delhi on Monday morning. He had a complicated adoption-cum-succession case in hand, and wanted to get a quick decision from the authorities, with a view to securing a big fee at the earliest possible opportunity. He was due to leave for Europe in the last week of March, and money, a fairly large amount of it, was required to exhibit his talents, federal ability and administrative capacity. After all, London was an expensive town. He couldn't possibly move about in high society



and official circles, and entertain lords, dukes and well-known personalities, without a very substantial bank balance. Here was a chance of securing a matter of ten thousand pounds of easy money just by pulling the proper strings. Why not rush the department concerned into a hasty decision and secure a favourable verdict? Jupiter and Saturn, Mercury and Venus, and all the other planets were on his side. He would take full advantage of these auspicious astro-physical influences and get the controversy settled once and for all. Hence his haste to be off.

Lord and Lady Rockbottom appeared to be in more permanent residence than ever at Villa Marina, and so did the Austro-Italian artist and his two charming companions; unless, of course, the latter were again shifted to Nishat Palace for His Highness's amusement. Horatio Johnbull had already received urgent telegrams from Lahore, requesting him to reach the capital of the Punjab before the election struggle. He must leave tomorrow morning and fulfil his political and social engagements in the north during the week.

He felt physically inert though mentally active on Monday morning. In order to stimulate thought and while away the idle hours before lunch, he took out his private diary from his attaché case and commenced jotting down impressions of the panorama of life witnessed by him during his stay in Premnagar.

"PREMNAGAR"

1-2-37

"Have learnt many things without any physical and mental effort on my part. Events have unfolded themselves in quick succession during the past fortnight. I can now see the scheme of things more clearly than I could before I landed in Indian India.

"Premnagar is only a typical specimen of the princely order. With few exceptions, whom I have not met, they are all alike. A trained anthropologist would have done full justice to their customs, institutions, and even to the divine nature of their germ plasm. I

can only study their absurd imitation of western vices and their slavish adherence to lascivious and infinitely multiple sensuality—protected, as it is, by their traditional observances, and by the deliberate connivance of the Paramount Power.

“As a class, they have a caste of their own; a caste which is not bounded by the narrow limits of religion. They despise all those who are termed ‘middle-class hircings.’ They worship all the titular rights conferred upon them, though their origin is often to be found in the haphazard sexual indulgence of their forefathers. They know that ancient chivalry is useless under the fire of machine-guns, but they insist upon proclaiming their inherited heroism to the world.

“They are not educated in the modern sense of the word. They hide their ignorance under the external veneer of a spurious civilisation. They have not even a bookish culture. They speak English with a supercilious accent, acquired probably through contact with European tutors.

“They think that their divine privileges entitle them to behave outrageously in private or in public. Public opinion in their own territories means nothing, for no one is allowed to criticise their divine actions. Indian politicians and British visitors always get something out of them for nothing. The former can be bought over by their hoarded gold and the latter easily blinded by lavish hospitality and princely favours.

“They are incredibly superstitious in so far as their personal safety is concerned. They consult astrologers in order to ascertain the most auspicious moments for the birth of a male child. They don’t bother about the influence of planets in their daily vices. They are like greedy youths in the hands of procurers who furnish them with the means of gratification. They purchase these pleasures at exorbitant prices.

“It is generally believed, though I doubt if it is entirely true, that sport and foreign travel improve the mind and widen the outlook. In the case of our prince-

ly friends, it is definitely a matter of doubt. They are apt to exaggerate their piddling personalities all the more after each world tour. They import the worst and leave the best behind. I may be wrong in my judgment; but from my casual talks, I gathered that there was a distinct tendency on their part to introduce the worst elements of western life into their homes.

"Shorn of their medieval plumage, dispossessed of their lustrous trappings and deprived of their hereditary glory, they would present a poor picture even in a side-show of a suburban carnival.

"Since good and evil are at times indistinguishable from each other, there must be some good even in their evil ways. There must be some potential reserve of goodness in their souls, or at any rate, in the souls of those young princes who will succeed the passing generation. The question is: How can that reserve be converted into dynamic power for good? The complete liquidation of their so-called divine rights is neither possible nor feasible under the existing conditions. The answer is not an easy one. It is fraught with political and psychological difficulties.

"As a first thought, it appears to me that their immersion in British Indian politics may, in due course, result in the abandonment of their seclusion and screened vices. Federation may, after all, solve some of these intricate problems. On the whole, I think a period of thirty years will suffice for this purpose. During that period, the younger generation may adapt itself to the forthcoming changes and get out of its enchanted circle. It is also possible that something totally different may happen in the meantime. The present craze for Socialism, Nazism, Fascism, and the somewhat obscure though deep-rooted schemes of our Far-Eastern friends may alter the face of things to come. Volcanic awakening in British India itself may produce sudden and unexpected repercussions. At this stage, no one can foresee the ultimate fate of the Indian States. I should certainly hesitate to predict the

future."

Singing and swaying with some joy known only to himself, Jackie walked into the writing-room and announced that His Highness would be happy if Horatio Johnbull would give him the pleasure of his company at dinner that evening.

It was a quiet and homely dinner, the main purpose of which was to bid the distinguished member of the British Parliament an affectionate farewell. Horatio Johnbull thanked His Highness for his charming hospitality and matchless courtesy. The latter responded in suitable terms and hoped to meet his guest again under western skies.



**PART FIVE** -  
**THE VIGOROUS NORTH**



## CHAPTER XXXI

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF LAHORE

"So, here we are in the Land of the Five Rivers at last," said Horatio Johnbull cheerfully to his two friends who sat down with him to an early breakfast in the panelled and well-ventilated dining hall of Spagati's Hotel in Lahore.

"I'm glad you had a comfortable journey," observed Sorab B. Pestonji, who had met Horatio Johnbull at the railway station at eight in the morning, and who had not seen him for fifteen years. Peter Mainwaring, Sorab's constant companion, and a member of the weird coterie, known in Lahore as the "Inscrutable Quartet," was also with him.

Sorab was inwardly bubbling with joy. It was a matter of great happiness for him to renew his friendship with a man whom he had known fairly intimately in his Oxford days. From the point of view of re-unions, Lahore is one of those god-forsaken places, where one rarely meets an English pal of olden days. It is much too far from the sea and the ports to attract many tourists and visitors. Sorab was therefore more than glad to meet again a friend who, he knew, was outside the circle of Civil Service standoffishness.

"And how did His Highness of Premnagar behave himself during your stay in his capital?" enquired Sorab B. Pestonji after the empty porridge plate had been removed from the table.

"Remarkably well," answered Horatio Johnbull with a twinkle in his eye. "I had a glorious time, I should say a princely time. The only place I was not allowed to visit was His Highness's central depot for



the storage of untouched virgins."

"Obviously, you didn't miss much in the way of female company," said Pestonji, in a bantering tone. "The old devil is very fond of impressing his guests by surrounding them with a remarkable assortment of unclaimed females. I wonder if those two Austrian dancers pestered you with their nymphomaniacal overtures."

"No, they didn't bother me. My young and gallant friend, Lord Rockbottom, was sufficiently keen to fill the gap of my indifference."

Peter Mainwaring was listening to this conversation with amusement. He knew a great deal about the ungrudging hospitality of Indian princes, but he had no direct experience of the human stimulants provided by the princely hosts. Ever since his arrival in India in 1927, as a Professor of English literature in one of those denominational colleges with which Lahore is flooded to its neck, he had avoided such contacts and had confined his attention to politics. He was a post-War product of Oxford with a reddish tinge in his mental and political outlook. Of medium height but well set-up, he carried his thirty-seven years remarkably easily. He was distinctly handsome in appearance and softly attractive in manner.

No one could tell that Peter had had a somewhat chequered career prior to his arrival in the capital of the Punjab. His father, Sir Charles Mainwaring, the great industrial magnate, had amassed a huge fortune during the war by creating a monopoly in the manufacture of optical instruments for naval and military purposes. Naturally he had placed high hopes in the capacity of his eldest son to carry on the traditions of the family in capturing the overseas Empire markets for all imaginable optical appliances. But the eldest son, Peter, instead of learning the secrets of range-finders, binoculars, telescopes and periscopes, had lost himself in such unproductive hobbies as poetry, art and literature, and had "tainted" his mind with "red"

pamphlets. And worst of all, he had gone and married a ravishingly beautiful bar-maid in London against his father's express wishes. As luck would have it, the bar-maid refused to be nourished with Tennyson or Wordsworth, Keats or Shelley and finally drifted into the whirlpool of London's vice. The result of this drifting was an ugly divorce case with a small army of co-respondents, and then release from the unsavoury bonds of his first marriage. Fortunately for Peter, the story of his marriage was known only to a very few people in India. His friend and former colleague, Azadali, of the Western India socialistic group, had personal recollections of the unhappy episode. Sorab also knew the details, but though his heart was like a graveyard of memories yet his mouth remained for ever closed, and so the secret was buried.

Looking at his watch Sorab B. Pestonji who had thoroughly enjoyed his conversation with Horatio Johnbull said impatiently: "Look here, old boy, we're both booked for the day and will have to leave you to your own devices. I shall have to rush off to the High Court, and Peter will stuff the heads of his students with Robert Louis Stevenson and Bernard Shaw. The car is at your disposal for the whole day, and the driver has been given full instructions to show you our wonderful city. If nothing unexpected turns up, we shall all meet at Vianelli's on the Mall at 6 p.m. You'll meet some very interesting people there." With a friendly nod and a parting cheerio, Sorab B. Pestonji walked out of the dining-hall, followed by Peter Mainwaring.

Left to himself, Horatio Johnbull studied the bearings of Spagati's Hotel in the first instance. His own suite, that is suite No. 32, was situated in the left wing of the one-storeyed building. The interior was sober in design and decoration, and there was a complete absence of those alarmingly futuristic styles which abound in some modern buildings. Bed-rooms, sitting-rooms and bath-rooms were comfortably furnished. Polished

and seasoned timber had been extensively used both in panelling and flooring, and a few hand-painted prints of hunting scenes and engravings of famous musicians and statesmen were hung in the public rooms. Passages and verandas were wide and airy, and there was a soothing sense of homeliness in the entire building. But the exterior was painfully depressing. It gave one the impression of barracks hastily constructed for the use of married soldiers. The gardens were carelessly laid out without the least regard to art. There were haphazard patches of green grass, yellow flowers, carnations and chrysanthemums everywhere. The lawns at the back of the building were studded with tents for the temporary accommodation of the seasonal influx of visitors.

From a discreet enquiry from the reception clerk, a hint or two from the Abdar (butler) and a casual talk with the assistant manager, Horatio Johnbull gleaned that the hotel was occupied largely by officials in the Government service, who were either confirmed bachelors or whose wives had deserted them and departed for sunny spots in the South of France or winter sports in Switzerland. There was also a small number of commercial travellers who were visiting the capital to book orders for their wares.

The members, both male and female, of the International Hectic Review Company whom Horatio Johnbull had seen and met on board s.s. "*Inconia*" were also staying in the hotel for another fortnight, to finish their Indian season. In spite of the wet blanket usually cast upon hotel residents by serene, sedate and elderly Government officials, the general atmosphere of Spagati's Hotel was enlivened and energised by the youthfully joyous *personel* of the dancing troupe.

The driver of the car placed at Horatio Johnbull's disposal was an unfortunate under-graduate of the Punjab University who after exhausting all channels of securing employment in a Government department, had taken to automobile engineering as a paying pastime,

and had finally accepted a lucrative job with Sorab B. Pestonji as a sort of secretary-chauffeur. He could speak English fairly well, though with a broad Punjabi accent; an accent which adds zest and vigour to any language. He carried out his chief's instructions with remarkable precision, and drove out of the hotel compound with Horatio Johnbull as the sole passenger sitting with him in the front seat.

It was a beautiful drive. From a spotlessly blue sky poured down streams of bright soft sunshine which made the winter forenoon pleasantly warm. Passing the venerably imposing statue of Queen Victoria, the car drove into the middle of the Mall, one of the most famous thoroughfares of Northern India, bordered on both sides by grotesque buildings, popular restaurants and patches of green shrubbery. A few hundred yards of driving brought the car to the main gate of the well-known Lawrence Gardens and the clubhouse of the Punjab Gymkhana, a fantastic structure, which, till now, has remained immune from the influence of modern architecture. Following the serpentine road, both sides of which were lined with tennis courts and cricket grounds, the car at last passed out of the northern gate of the gardens and re-entered the wide stretches of the Mall.

Again, a series of scattered bungalows and curiously shaped lawns came into view. The green hedges and the dirty red colour of houses created a banal scene, till the small canal bridge was reached. There was nothing particularly ugly, nor definitely beautiful, to attract the eye in these parts. It seemed that the layout of residential buildings had been left to the unimaginative control of the middle-class citizens who went in for ostentation rather than for style or comfort.

Straight ahead appeared the boundary of the Lahore Cantonment. This area was amazingly clean and airy. There were rows and rows of well-built barracks, rectangular open spaces, amusement parks, tarred and cemented roads, low office buildings, hospi-

tals and entertainment halls. There was nothing unusual in all this. It was simply a repetition of other Malls and other military stations.

The afternoon was full of experiences and impressions of different kinds. The Land of the Five Rivers appeared to be more vigorous than the Gangetic plains or the western coast, and her people looked more virile and better fortified against all forms of struggles than the inhabitants of industrial towns. Even the buildings of the railway station looked more like the ramparts of an old fortress than structures for the housing of trains and passengers.

When the car deviated from the Mall and turned into Nila Gumboz, the pageant of humanity changed its outer form and became vividly eastern. Big stone buildings for the sale of socks, stockings, corsets, frocks and gowns, bicycles and motor cars and so on were no longer to be seen. Their place was taken by low-roofed congested shops and moveable stalls. By the time the car turned into the famous bazaar known as Anarkali, Horatio Johnbull realised that he was no longer passing through the fashionable west-end of Lahore. All the same, he was deeply impressed with the trade and activity of this narrow thoroughfare, where every conceivable article, from the smallest pin to the largest tent, could be purchased at remarkably low prices. You couldn't get away from the familiar odours of fried fish and chips, roasted kababs, and spicy curries, as you drove along to the lower end of Anarkali where it terminates in front of one of the main gates of the old walled city. In this quarter you can haggle about the prices of fruits, vegetables and sweetmeats without giving any offence to the shopkeepers or the passers-by.

The driver of the car did not wish to drive into the walled city, as it was much easier to get into it than to get out of it. He took a turn to the left and drove straight towards the Ravi Road, which carries hundreds of devout bathers every morning to the sacred waters of one of the Big Five Rivers. Between the city wall

and the Ravi Road, a large open space had been converted into a temporary pavilion, a sort of open-air lecture hall, where would-be public benefactors could give vent to their suppressed feelings and create a halo of national or religious importance around their swollen heads.

A charming young lady, seemingly a Hindu girl of good birth and proud ancestry, was standing on the top of a large unwieldy table. Her shingled head and dark luminous eyes clearly indicated that, she was contemptuously indifferent to the persecution of public opinion. She had a fine healthy olive complexion, and her whole body was overflowing with vigour and vitality. She stood there firmly in long riding boots with a domineering expression on her face. She was dressed in Jodhpur breeches and a warm woollen blouse and carried a hunting crop in her left hand. With her right hand, she was waving vigorously to a crowd of over three hundred under-graduates and post-graduates who had gone on a "stay-out" strike for some imaginary or real grievance and were now listening attentively to the declamation of the handsome girl in riding-breeches.

The car stopped for a while. Horatio Johnbull got out and crossed the pavement to the edge of the pavilion where he could hear the speech clearly. Obviously she was discoursing on a political theme. He heard the latter part of the speech. "This duality," she was saying, "or what is technically known as diarchy, is, in reality, a form of dictatorial government. Its working depends entirely upon the personal plan and policy of a civilian governor. It gives the selected ministers a wrong training in the difficult art of administration, and impedes progress in social and political life. It is a sort of pantomime in which political Lilliputians move about as if they were national giants. It has no basis in democracy. In short, it is a farce."

\*The resonant voice of the young lady rang out above the crowd. Horatio Johnbull listened to it with eagerness. "And now, friends and comrades," she went

on, "we are going to have the domination of the Unionist party. God alone knows the meaning of the word 'unionist' as applied to the present stage of Indian politics. I don't, nor do you. It is certainly not the union of heterogeneous political creeds that the Party is aiming at. It cannot be the union of the vastly differing vested interests that the Party is striving for, as there are several commercial magnates and industrialists who are outside the unionist group. It must be some peculiar chemical fusion that the party is trying to create, through which they hope to establish the supremacy of the landowning classes. For the present, we are not concerned with the name of the new chemical concoction. What I particularly wish to point out to all my friends and colleagues is that there is a great difference between serving the masses and ruling the masses, between human welfare and efficient administration, between *Sarkari* prestige and national pride. What we want is true and ungrudging service. And that service, in my opinion, can only be secured from the National Mirror, our Kaumi organisation. I appeal to you to work for and to support our national candidates."

The speech ended in the midst of uproarious cheers from the students. Horatio Johnbull moved back to the car and continued his outward journey. The secretary-chauffeur explained to him that the table speaker was a renowned personality in Lahore. Lila Bhagwat was the daughter of a retired excise official who had made sufficient money in the manufacture of illicit liquor to send his daughter to a local college to take her master's degree in economics and sociology. She was a brilliant speaker and a whole-hogger in politics, an irreconcilable left-winger who believed in nothing short of complete independence. Dissatisfied with the half-hearted ways of older politicians, she had taken the leadership of the younger set in her own hands and had fearlessly preached her national doctrines. Everything about Lila was vigorous, her language, her thoughts, her public person-

ality, and even her private sex life. She was not ashamed of intimacy with sexworthy comrades. She wanted manly men in all walks of life.

Half a mile from the scene of the vigorous speech by the vigorous Lila of Lahore, the car stopped on the left of the Ravi Road, near a small dilapidated Hindu temple. A short statured, hoary-headed and bespectacled Hindu missionary, with a long white beard and an orange-coloured robe was seated on a small wooden platform about two feet higher than the ground level. In a high-flown Sanskritised Hindi, he was preaching the gospel of the Vedas to a mixed audience of old men, young women and suckling children, seated quite serenely and reverently on a large cotton carpet which covered the entire open enclosure. Sitting in the car and straining his ears to the utmost, Horatio Johnbull could not understand even a single word of the sermon which the missionary was transmitting to his devout listeners in a slowly-modulated musical voice. The driver, however, explained to him that the Swami was delivering a discourse on the universality and all-inclusiveness of Hinduism. So long as a man was born in the Hindu fold, he could declare himself a Hindu with vengeance. Theism, atheism, agnosticism and pantheism, were all different forms of worship and mental concentration. It was not necessary to believe in or worship a personal God. The rituals prescribed under the various systems of philosophy propounded by the ancient sages were indispensable for the protection of *Dharma*. The physical and mental exercises laid down in the Yogic system were necessary for the achievement of self-realisation. The driver said that he could not follow the rest of the discourse as the learned missionary was using unintelligible phrases.

The car moved on again, and after passing through a thinly wooded area, crossed the railway bridge leading to Shahdara, at one time, a famous place in Mughal history, and now, a scattered mass of factory sites, royal tombs, historical monuments and restored gardens and



terraces. It was already nearing five o'clock in the afternoon, and there was not much time left for keeping the evening appointment at Vianelli's on the Mall. The driver took a sharp circular turn somewhere on the Grand Trunk Road and drove back towards the Mall.

The first impressions of a tourist in a strange town are not always lasting impressions. But there was something strangely unusual in the vigorous speech of Lila Bhagwat that left its mark on the subconscious mind of Horatio Johnbull. He could not recall to his conscious mind the exact corresponding incident in his past life, but he had a vague idea that he had witnessed similar youthful enthusiasm and sincerity somewhere in England during the war time.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE INSCRUTABLE QUARTET

Sorab Behram Pestonji was a true Zoroastrian at heart; but having first seen the light of life in the vigorous climate of Northern India and having migrated to an English public school at a very early age, he had discarded some of the superficial symbols of his race; so much so that, at first sight, even a trained observer could not trace his racial origin. He was a fairly tall man and had a pale and bloodless complexion. His jet-black glossy hair had a slight natural wave, which gave him the appearance of an artist; but unfortunately his monocled eye reversed this impression into that of a diplomat or barrister. He had an Oxonian accent which imparted dignity and charm to his otherwise dull speech. It was not a pose on his part. It was an acquisition which became a second nature in later years.

By profession, he was a hard-working lawyer, a real slogger who could turn a brief inside out in less than twenty-four hours. In social life he was a good "mixer." He believed in being all things to all men. Hard experience in legal practice had taught him that the real secret of success in life was to be found in establishing harmonious relations with the members of different communities. With this guiding principle he had succeeded in creating a vast circle of friends among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and even among the so-called "depressed classes" of the local population; with the result that he had become a sort of mixture of all the movements which flourished in Lahore, such as Rotarianism, Freemasonry, Fabian-

ism, together, of course, with trade and business. He was a rational socialist when he was short of funds, a convinced capitalist when he had something to invest, a national liberal in his capacity as a loyal member of the Punjab Bar, and a rank reformist in his capacity as an organiser of the labour movement. Professionally speaking, he did not care which political party came in-to power. Litigation, according to him, was ingrained in human nature, and must therefore continue to exercise unabated influence. People would always have differences and the need for divorce would never cease; unless of course people changed their tactics and went in for the practice of "free-love."

His unquestioned sincerity, even in professional matters, made him universally popular. In his spare moments, he enjoyed organising games and sports for unemployed cooks, bearers, sweepers and scavengers. He organised cricket matches and hockey contests and won the everlasting gratitude of the working-classes. In his professional hours, he listened to the woeful stories of the discarded European mistresses of rich Punjabi merchants and foolish army officers, to the heart-rending tales of Anglo-Indian wives whose husbands were carrying on openly and flauntingly with low class maid-servants, to Sergeant Majors whose wives had run away with better paid lovers. He assisted everyone to the best of his ability; and if an amicable settlement were not possible, he fought and won the case for his clients with his brilliant oratory in the courts.

He also dabbled in company law, not on its constructive side but chiefly in its destructive provisions. Liquidation of desirable and undesirable companies, of loan societies, of matrimonial agencies, of quick profit-sharing investment trusts had become a paying proposition in the Punjab of late years. Sorab had no objection to the performance of their funeral rites and if a complicated affair with prospects of prolonged liquidation proceedings came into his hands, he snatched at it with zest, even if it involved a fresh reading of the good old

Companies' Act. For all respectable people, the chief purpose of life is to maintain a steady income. It does not seem to matter whether the sources of a steady income are other people's domestic worries or financial misfortunes.

The coterie known as the Inscrutable Quartet was really an intellectual group. Peter Mainwaring, even after his trouble and divorce from a faithless wife, had retained a tremendous reserve of humour. He was a great lover in thought but inclined to shirk in actual action. This undisputed capacity for shirking gave him all the greater zest for poetry and literature. He was so passionately fond of D. H. Lawrence that he could not discuss anything intelligently without quoting significant passages from that author's banned books. His presence in the coterie was stimulating, not only for himself but also for Sorab and the other two members—Manzoor Husain and Din Dyal, who met frequently at his flat to discuss his verses and essays. The last two people had been informed of the evening engagement at Vianelli's on the Mall, and were patiently awaiting the arrival of Pestonji and Mainwaring in a corner of the lounge.

Unlike *Ciro's* of Calcutta, Vianelli's was a humble restaurant of a comparatively recent growth. It was, however, better known for the quality of its beer and wines than for its interior decorations and appointments. It had a single hall of an unusually large size overlooked by a small orchestral balcony. Small glass-topped tables and cane chairs were scattered in Bohemian fashion about the floor. Early comers could always select suitable tables in suitable places without being in the way of late arrivals.

Vianelli's of Lahore did not specialise in cocktails with fancy names and uncertain after-effects. Its speciality was beer—Danish beer, Dutch beer, German beer, Czechoslovakian beer, English beer, and even American canned beer. If you were hungry, Vianelli's could always give you a double helping of Mixed Grill

or Macaroni à la Italienne, without charging extra for the second portion. The management was efficient and extraordinarily polite. On a Sunday morning, after a late church meeting, you could not get a table in the lounge. In Lahore, you could drink iced beer at any time of the year, and at Vianelli's you could always be sure of getting the best beer.

At ten minutes past six in the evening, Horatio Johnbull entered the lounge and walked straight to the table at which the members of the Inscrutable Quartet were seated. Sorab introduced him to Manzoor Husain and Din Dyal, and offered him a cane chair between his own and Peter's, so that he could have a full view of the lounge and its patrons.

"How did you amuse yourself in the afternoon?" enquired Peter Mainwaring, after beer had been ordered.

"There was nothing much to see on the Mall," answered Horatio Johnbull; "just the usual rows of commercial buildings, banks and theatres, with a few spots of green here and there. But the drive through Anarkali was rather interesting, and still more interesting was the spectacle of a young heroine in breeches and riding boots, flinging a vigorous political speech at a batch of college students."

"Now, isn't it funny that Mr. Johnbull should behold the sweet face of Lila Bhagwat on the very first day of his arrival," said Peter, addressing Sorab Pestonji.

"Miracles do happen, even in these days," observed Horatio Johnbull. And then recalling the effect produced by Lila on the students, he added: "She seems to be a singular personality, and possesses the gift of the gab."

Manzoor Husain was a professional labour leader. He could produce a lightning strike in the workshops of the North Western Railway at a moment's notice. He believed in the theory and practice of direct action, but he was definitely opposed to the interference of women in the battlefields of men. A hundred per cent man, out to fight against the solid wall of capitalism,

could not expect to break even a portion of it, if he had to follow the lead of a charming young woman. Although he did not object to the release of women from the bondage of old restrictions, he certainly opposed their association in political movements. He actively denounced the morbid westernisation of Punjabi girls, who, he maintained, should not be allowed to indulge in reckless breaches of the old social and sexual conventions. Old-fashioned modesty, he declared, should always be at a premium, for it indicated that subtlety of charm which only an eastern girl could display. Brazen-facedness should not be tolerated, and new-fangled notions of "free-love" should be suppressed without mercy. Social life in Lahore, he often said, would go to the dogs, if young girls were allowed to dance and sit out with daring young men. Although there was some harmony of interest between Lila Bhagwat and himself, at least in the political field, and although there was a soft corner in his heart for her, he did not like the vigour of her speeches and the rapidity of her actions. He was not quite pleased with the compliments paid to her by Horatio Johnbull.

"Oh yes," he remarked, as if he only took a casual interest in Horatio Johnbull's reference to Lila's virile personality; "Lila is indeed a dynamic force in the movement, but you must remember that there are no outstanding personalities left in the Punjab now. Next to Bengal, our province was a pioneer in the creation of political consciousness, and like Bengal, we are far behind the other provinces in the efficiency of our national organisation. The old stalwarts are dead and gone, and their places have been taken by the landowning and landleasing politicians whose very existence as vested classes depends upon the continuance of the present regime. Whatever is left of the old national movement is in danger of extinction, as it is in the hands of mediocrities whose tiny brains cannot accommodate big ideas. And on the top of it, women are making heedless incursions into the political field.

They are unsuited to the task and will never secure a substantial following."

"I'm afraid I don't agree with the latter part of your statement," said Horatio Johnbull in a low voice. "Women are capable of great sacrifices, and even of leadership in times of emergency. We cannot check the overflowing stream of their social advance. Personally I think we should encourage their participation in affairs of national importance." He paused for a few moments and then continued the rest of his argument. "As regards the first part of your statement, I shouldn't be a pessimist, if I were in your position. It's a well-known rule of the game that, even the oldest stalwarts must yield to the influence of the younger set in times of national strife. Even if your old stalwarts were alive, they would have lost their original political force. Rest assured, my friend, new leaders will spring up as and when they're required."

"And till then you recommend the present state of slavery?" insinuated Manzoor Husain, somewhat peevishly.

Horatio Johnbull did not answer the sarcastic query; but Din Dyal, who was familiarly known as "Double Dee," began to think furiously. His father, Lala Prem Dyal had made five lacs by manipulating the market for bleached longcloth during the last two years of the Great War. It was said that he had booked ahead the entire production of a Lancashire mill, whose marks and qualities were in popular demand throughout Northern India. After the "corner" succeeded and the profits accumulated, Prem Dyal acquired somehow the title of "Latha Seth." He re-invested the money in property, and in due course, reaped a rich harvest in rents for his only son, Din Dyal. In his turn, the only son took great care of the ever-increasing rents and compound interest, and ultimately succeeded in raising the fortune to a total of twenty lacs.

To while away his time, Din Dyal went to Ireland

and graduated from the National University. On his return, he found life easy and agreeable, and as a matter of mental recreation, took up free-lance journalism. For ten years, he had been a member of the coterie, and for ten solid years, he lived handsomely on rents and interest, and went on accumulating fat, with the result that at thirty-five, he had a bloated face, a double chin, a tilted nose and a promising belly. Being rich, he was unencumbered by any professional handicaps and official restrictions. He was indifferent to progress and reform, and in politics, he maintained a neutral attitude. Having inherited a vast fortune from his father, he believed in destiny, both individual and national, and deprecated unnecessary exertion and agitation. Being free from poverty himself he was impatient of religious virtues and asceticism, and believed in leading a happy-go-lucky life. In spite of his apparent stupidity, he regarded himself as a man of intellect. Manzoor Husain's remark about the continuation of slavery roused him into activity.

"Excuse my butting in," he said grandiloquently, "but I must clear your brain of vagueness on the question of slavery. We are all slaves in the wider sense of the word. There is always slavery in some form or other in all countries of the world. Slavery to religious rituals is as bad, if not worse, than slavery to meaningless antediluvian customs. Slavery to medical treatment to keep your bowels clear every morning is as bad as slavery to sports to keep the body fit. Slavery to opium, cocaine, veronal, and even tobacco, is certainly very embarrassing when you can't get requisite quantities of these drugs. And again, slavery to sartorial fashions is definitely painful when you can't afford to wear fashionable garments. Slavery to the sexual urge leads to morbid practices and finally, slavery to the commands of your T. U. C. headquarters is no less disturbing than slavery to the laws of the present Government. My dear boy, there is slavery everywhere. We shall remain in fetters till we cross the



Rubicon, and there again, we don't know whether we shall be prisoners or slaves. Why worry your wise head about political slavery, which is not so heinous after all?"

"If you have finished with your sermon on slavery," said Manzoor Husain irritably, "might I suggest that there is no sense in mixing up the issues? Obedience to the commands of the T. U. C. headquarters is not slavery. It is discipline. No party organisation can exist without discipline, and discipline is the voluntary acceptance of certain rules and regulations formulated with the unanimous concurrence of the general body; something totally different from political slavery."

"Why don't you go a step further than Ibsen and abolish the State, abolish sex, abolish society, abolish religion and finally abolish capitalism?" retorted Din Dyal, without making an intelligent attempt to explain the difference between discipline and slavery.

"There is no need to abolish all these institutions," answered Manzoor Husain in a dogmatic manner. "We can regulate them as Hitler has done in Germany and Mussolini in Italy."

"But my dear fellow," said Double Dee, "regulation will not remove slavery. On the contrary, it will impose further restrictions on individual liberty. It will crush private desire, and replace it by state desire, which would mean that, even in our love affairs, we shall be subjected to state control and dictatorial direction. No, no, Manzoor old man, I can't accept your vague idealism as a practical creed, and I am sure my friends here would also refuse to accept it. Tackle each problem in its relation to the existing conditions of society, otherwise you would land us all in further forms of slavery. What do you say, Peter old boy?"

Peter Mainwaring adopted a non-technical attitude. "To my mind," he said, "the whole discussion is futile, for the simple reason that you can't distinguish one form of slavery from another form, nor can you define freedom as an abstract reality. Both slavery and free-

dom are relative terms, conditioned by persons, places and circumstances. You're both roaming in the wilderness of logic and can't see each other's heads through the dense foliage of the trees." Without finishing the rest of his argument, he turned his eyes towards the main entrance of the lounge and almost shouted with delight. "Hullo! Here comes the Big Baby."

Dressed in a light grey sari and a "see-more" blouse, with a tiny red dot on her broad forehead (which she regarded more as a beauty spot than as a symbol of virginity), Lila Bhagwat flowed into the lounge of Vianelli's on the Mall. She was accompanied by a young Bengali boy of about twenty years of age and a barnacled gentleman of about forty. The former was dressed in a dark grey lounge suite and had a brilliant necktie around his soft collar. His long black hair rested in curls on the collar of his grey coat and he walked in a graceful way just behind Lila. His handsome clean-shaven face indicated æsthetic temperament and artistic vocation. The barnacled gentleman in black coat and striped trousers looked like a pedagogue who had just returned from a senate meeting, after emptying his stuffed head of all the chemical and mathematical rubbish stored there for years.

"Look at that bumptious scaramouch!" remarked Peter Mainwaring, with an impatient gesture of his left hand. "He thinks that the vulgar exhibition of his bulging buttocks and padded bosoms is going to save the soul of India from perdition."

"Who's he?" enquired Horatio Johnbull, as the trio sat down at an opposite table under the orchestral balcony.

"He's a dancing master by name of Kiren Suniyal," answered Peter. "His stage name is Krishna Kant, and he's amorously lionized by the fashionable society of Lahore. He has succeeded to a remarkable degree in giving poise and balance to old masters of fifty and sixty. By winning the confidence of the mothers, he has managed to charm the daughters by teaching them

seductive and suggestive classical dancing. Renaissance and revival and all that tommy rot. In his unoccupied moments, he acts as a sort of glorified gigolo and poses as an artist in thought, word and deed. He's a despicable creature."

"He doesn't look so despicable as you make out," said Horatio Johnbull; "perhaps his misfortune lies in looking sweetly effeminate, and that in itself may make a deep appeal to our heroic Amazon, the lady in grey." Then turning to Sorab Pestonji, he asked: "And who's the fellow in sombre city clothes?"

"He's a young chemist named Kacker," replied Sorab. "Ever since his return from Germany, about three years ago, he has been trying to find out a chemical recipe for turning all shades of brown into bloodless white. He's definitely convinced that if he had been a white man, he would have been appointed the chief director of India's chemical destiny."

"Is it an amusing fad, or a serious attempt on his part to change the looks of the brown races?" asked Horatio Johnbull, highly amused.

"Both, I should imagine," replied Sorab in his usual shortcut style.

But Din Dyal was not satisfied with this brief answer. He was convinced in his own mind that the colour question was a matter of political power and economic supremacy. He maintained that if the brown races bossed the world and possessed colonies and invincible navies, brown colour would become more popular and fashionable than white. He could not restrain himself from expressing an opinion on this question.

"Apart from the political prestige of the white races," he observed, "I don't see why brown complexion should be regarded as inferior to white. After all, if you argue the point logically, you must come to the conclusion that the selection of brown colour for the vast majority of the human race is an act of Divine Will. Since God made man in His own image, and since Jesus

was His only son, you cannot escape the inevitable inference that God Himself is brown. And if the Father and the Son are brown, why should any brown person get the inferiority complex?"

Horatio Johnbull was again amused with Double Dee's peculiar logic. He simply remarked: "I must congratulate you on your ingenious though somewhat far-fetched conclusions."

Sorab Pestonji looked at the clock on the opposite wall, and realised that time had passed very quickly. "Forgive me for interrupting a very interesting discussion," he said, "but we must fix up your official programme tomorrow morning. I'm on very good terms with one of the ministers and I could take you to his office at eleven in the morning, if that suits you. He'll probably depute one of his officials to show you all the wonderful sights they keep in stock for distinguished visitors. You'll see all the stage effects in and around Lahore during the next few days."

The Inscrutable Quartet dispersed, as usual, in a chorus of "cheerios" and "so-longs," and Horatio Johnbull returned to Spagati's Hotel for a quiet and well-deserved rest in his comfortable suite of rooms.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE SPECTACULAR BENEFICENCE

The Hon. Minister for Beneficent Activities (nick-named Homba) was a quinquagenarian of the old school, that is, the school which believed that an intellectual person of constructive thoughts and habits should never accept the responsibilities of ministerial office unless he has first made his pile, and having made his pile, he should see that the pile multiplies itself during his term of office through the beneficent measures introduced by him with the unanimous vote of the legislature. He was a man of great legal acumen, and combined determination with perseverance to such an extent that ordinary "no confidence" motions could not shake his equilibrium. But having made his pile in business, and not in law, he knew the art of haggling and could handle any awkward situation with the same success he had formerly applied to money-making.

The Hon. Minister was simply delighted to make the acquaintance of Horatio Johnbull Esq., M. P., and would certainly depute a senior official of one of his many departments to show him the various industrial, agricultural and cultural centres created and organised by the Government of the province for the uplift and economic welfare of the people. He explained to his honoured visitor that the dual system of Government in the Punjab had proved an unqualified success and assured him that, but for the continued and unswerving loyalty of the Civil Service secretaries, the honourable ministers would have been landed in a hopeless mess. What he meant by a "hopeless mess," Horatio Johnbull could not fathom, as the honourable gentleman drowned

any sort of query in his overwhelming narration of the beneficent activities of his departments.

The S.O. or the Senior Official, was also a man of vigorous habits and enterprising nature. He was soon able to smell out the importance of this temporary job and the ultimate likelihood of finding his name in print in some parliamentary or official publication. He drew up a crowded programme of inspection, jotting down in order of importance, all the major and minor institutions controlled by his government. The result of his diligence was that Horatio Johnbull was condemned to a week's "hard labour" with only two evenings free for private amusement and recreation. The generous and enthusiastic S.O. went to the length of throwing in a couple of tea parties engineered by himself and financed by the respectable citizens of Lahore.

• Horatio Johnbull had a round of sight-seeing. The S.O. was a shrewd and methodical man. In pursuance of his noble mission, he started his duties with the inspection of animals and their ailments. He took Horatio Johnbull to the Central Veterinary College. He showed him wards for sick dogs and stables for ailing horses and pregnant mares. The Superintendent of the animal hospital explained that the wealth of the Punjab depended to a large extent upon the sound breeding of cattle and livestock. He further assured him that, under the humanitarian direction of the Hon. Minister, cows and bulls of aristocratic pedigree were being crossbred for the ultimate welfare of the peasantry.

From animals, the S.O. switched on to human beings, and took the distinguished visitor to a modern Widow's Home, where young girls of tender age, whom early marriage had left helpless, were taught knitting, embroidery and other useful arts and crafts, and where prospective husbands were taken round for the inspection of likely brides. Horatio Johnbull was surprised to find that there were neither signs of widowhood, nor tears of sorrow in the eyes of the young ones, who

went about with smiling faces in saffron-coloured saris and sandals. Some of the girls were strikingly beautiful and were fully aware of their charms and sexual exuberance. Horatio Johnbull hoped that they would soon be freed from the chains of sex repressions and safely married to decent husbands.

On the next day, the S.O. began the dynamic side of his programme. He took Horatio Johnbull to technical schools and technological institutes, where Punjabi youths were being educated and trained in the various branches of applied sciences and engineering, where electrically-driven machines were turning out carpenters, mechanics, plumbers, sanitary engineers, boiler inspectors, draughtsmen, fitters, turners and engine drivers by the hundreds every year. All these institutions were like rolling mills where human rails were turned out and turned into shape for industrial purposes. The youngsters showed signs of fatigue and boredom long before the completion of their grinding and rolling. But since it was necessary to feed industry with human tools, the question of physical suffering did not arise. Once started, the game must go on, whether it sapped the blood of early youth or whether it prepared the youngsters for definite careers. Horatio Johnbull saw that, much against their will, the sons of humble artisans and lower middle-class employees were being forced into an ill-organised system of mechanisation.

The equipment of some of these institutes was extravagantly ambitious. There were steel-testing machines which could only be used in large shipyards. There were radial drills useful only for the manufacture of high-speed tools. There were elaborately equipped laboratories for testing water, coal and minerals. Lacs and lacs of rupees had been spent on endless lines of foundries and engineering workshops. But strict economy was observed in the engagement of qualified instructors, lecturers and professors. Teaching is a low-paid profession all over the world and the Punjab

is no exception to the rule. The authorities concerned, however, did not realise that a good engineering instructor could not impart useful knowledge to a crowd of unwilling students without feeding himself with adequate food and clothing himself in respectably clean clothes.

As Saturday, the 6th of February, was a half-holiday, the Senior Official decided to concentrate on a single area. He took Horatio Johnbull to Shahdara, where the Local Government had set aside, some years ago, about a hundred acres of land for the establishment of technological institutes and demonstration factories. In the midst of eucalyptus trees, domestic gardens and flower-beds, stood a tanning factory, a modern weaving, sizing and finishing shed, a large dyeing and bleaching factory, a small power station, an institute for dyers and bleachers, a large number of bungalows, workers' quarters and students' hostels. It was an ideal spot for the industrial uplift of the younger generation; free from the nuisance of smoke, dirt and squalor, though thoroughly infested with malarial mosquitoes.

The S. O. took great pains to explain the history of the various institutions set up by the Government for the benefit of the village artisans and unemployed matriculates and undergraduates. The differences between chrome tanning and bark tanning, between a hand loom and a power loom, between fast colours and basic colours, between sized cloth and unsized cloth and between glazed shirtings and uncalendered dhoties were duly explained by the instructors in charge of the various sections. It was pointed out to Horatio Johnbull that, as a result of the instruction given by the experts, the incompetent village dyers had given up of their own accord the use of fading colours, though it was not absolutely incumbent upon them to do so. The tanners had considerably improved the quality of their tanned hides through the demonstrations given by the touring classes organised by the tannery, and the weavers had increased their production by using the power loom in



preference to the old-fashioned hand loom. The S. O. held out great hopes for the future of the young educated workers who, he maintained, would be ultimately absorbed in increasing numbers by the modernised industries of the province.

On the way back to Spagati's Hotel, Horatio Johnbull asked the Senior Official if the reckless multiplicity of technological centres was not responsible for the alarming increase in the number of unemployed youths. "No Sir," he answered, "we tackled that problem a long time ago, through our 'Unemployment Committee.' We are now able to find suitable vacancies for our men in the province itself."

"But I was told in Bombay," said Horatio Johnbull, "that trained men from your institutions were marching from office to office in search of jobs. When they couldn't secure suitable employment in Bombay and Ahmedabad, they went back to the Punjab, thoroughly disgusted with their vocations and bad luck."

The S. O. did not like to commit himself in a hurry, lest he should unconsciously censure the higher policy. After some hesitation, he replied: "Well Sir, there is some truth in what you say, but I think our own industries will ultimately absorb the products of our demonstration factories."

"It looks like putting the cart before the horse" said Horatio Johnbull impatiently. "In Western countries, industries are established before the establishment of polytechnics. As the demand for technically trained workers increases, apprentices are given theoretical and practical instruction in the processes of an industry; with the result that trained men find no difficulty in finding suitable employment after they've completed their courses of study. I'm sure you'll agree with me that a planned system of technical education reduces the dangers of unemployment to a considerable degree."

The S.O. not only agreed with Horatio Johnbull, but also promised to put up a strong constructive note

to the Hon. Minister, for the benign consideration of the Local Government.

In the evening, a telephone message came from Peter Mainwaring, enquiring if Horatio Johnbull would care to share pot luck with him at his flat in the Rohini Building. Since the invitation was entirely informal, there was no need for a dinner jacket and a double-boiled shirt. Having been thoroughly saturated with "dyeing" and "bleaching", "weaving" and "tanning", Horatio Johnbull accepted the offer with gratitude and arrived at the flat a little after eight in the evening.

Like many other buildings on the Mall, the Rohini Building was a three-storeyed structure, grotesque in external appearance, and built chiefly for the collection of exorbitant rents. It was, however, provided with a dainty little lift which took Horatio Johnbull, slowly and steadily, to his destination on the third floor.

Peter Mainwaring had a winning smile on his face and a cunning wink in his eye when he received Horatio Johnbull at the front entrance. "I've got a pleasant surprise for you this evening, Mr. Johnbull," he said as he escorted his guest to the oriental drawing-room.

The drawing-room was tastefully furnished in Indian style, with profusion of ottomans and cosy seats in all possible and impossible nooks and corners. One of the walls was upholstered in scarlet and gold brocade, with a thin black frame to bring out the beauty of its design and workmanship against a lighter background. Hand-painted pictures of Shahjahan, Mumtaz Mahal and Jahangir were hung on another wall. Electric lights shaded with yellow silk covers adorned the ceiling and produced a peculiarly soothing effect.

In the farthest corner from the front door sat a young lady in a low easy chair, resting her feet on a soft cushion and smoking a perfumed Egyptian cigarette in a leisurely manner.

After a minute or two, Horatio Johnbull's eyes got accustomed to the half light in the room, and to the fantastic oriental decorations which Peter Mainwaring

described as his collection of "*objets d'art*". He suddenly realised that a beautiful young lady was sitting luxuriously in the corner. Just as he made a movement to apologise for his unintentional negligence, Sorab Pestonji appeared, as if from nowhere, and came beside him. "You've seen Lila Bhagwat before, haven't you, old chap?" he enquired in a casual manner.

Horatio Johnbull made a courteous bow, and addressing the young lady, said, "Oh yes, I've had the pleasure of listening to your open air speech; but I must confess that tonight I can hardly recognise the vigorous lady of Wednesday last."

"Do sit down next to me, Mr. Johnbull," said Lila in a languidly soft voice, "I was longing to meet you, and should have met you earlier, but this silly ass Sorab was trying to put off the meeting by inventing all sorts of lame excuses, such as official engagements, etc."

"He wasn't far wrong in his inventions," said Horatio Johnbull in an equally soft tone. "As a matter of fact, I have been, what you would call, hobnobbing with the bureaucracy during the last three days. I'm delighted to meet you now." Stirred by a strong desire to pay a direct compliment to a girl who a few days ago looked more like a tomboy than like the ravishing beauty of tonight, he added: "You do look charming in your beautiful sari."

"I'm glad you like it," said Lila pleased with the compliment. "I dress in jodhpurs and riding-boots on such occasions as demand direct action and vigorous speech. Sari makes me feel particularly lazy and incompetent."

"So long as it adds to your personal charms, you shouldn't worry about its psychological effect," answered Horatio Johnbull. After a moment's reflection, he changed the conversation, and enquired: "What's your personal opinion about the forthcoming elections?"

"There can't be two opinions about the success of the Unionist Party," said Lila in a slightly depressed tone. "The National Mirror is no longer effective in

this province. We have no bold leaders, and there is plenty of communal strife everywhere, engineered of course by petty-minded self-seekers. The sheer weight of wealth enables the land-owning classes to influence the befogged minds of the electorate. I'm afraid the hungry peasants will continue to live in dire poverty till the arrival of the new era of socialism."

"Don't you think that the Unionist Party will make every effort to restore prosperity and improve agricultural and industrial conditions?" enquired Horatio Johnbull.

"Like their predecessors, the *diarchists*, they will stage spectacular shows," replied Lila. "They will organise demonstrations and produce first-class Canadian wheat and American cotton on state-owned farms. They will discover chemical remedies for destroying the pests, which the poor farmer will never be able to purchase and use. They will increase the net value of agricultural produce by reducing the acreage and letting the peasantry starve on the uncultivated tracts of land. They will reduce the indebtedness of the cultivator by saddling him with further loans and advances. And finally, they will hold Durbars, more spectacular and glorious than those of their predecessors, and distribute gilded certificates and silver medals and robes of honour to all those who have rendered meritorious services to the state."

"You seem to be cynical and pessimistic about the future," said Horatio Johnbull. "I agree with you that there's a great deal of Spectacular Beneficence all around us; but I'm not altogether pessimistic about the ultimate utility of this display."

Lila knocked off the ashes of her perfumed cigarette into a dainty little ash-tray lying on the table beside her, inhaled a deep puff, blew out the smoke in a spiral screen, closed her eyes for a moment, and then said: "Yes, ultimately all these shows may come in handy. But when? That's the question. Crores are being wasted in futile propaganda and showmanship. If these

crores had been diverted into constructive channels thirty years ago, our province would have been the first to abolish poverty and ignorance. No, Mr. Horatio Johnbull, we cannot wait for the occurrence of miracles. We must act soon and bring about a radical change in the existing conditions."

Peter Mainwaring came into the drawing-room and interrupted the discussion by shouting out: "Both of you look miserably serious. What about a spot of food and drink now?" Then, turning to Horatio Johnbull, he continued: "I'm sorry I can't offer you a very elaborate meal. A heavy supper is bad for one's beauty sleep as you know."

Sorab marched into the room, followed by a neatly dressed bearer carrying a large number of plates, glasses and bottles. A small round table was shifted to the middle of the room, and a buffet supper was soon laid out on it. Peter requested his guests to help themselves to the various items of the informal meal. "There are some nice chicken patties and cheese sandwiches on this side, and a plateful of sausage-rolls on the other. I would also recommend a double helping of this nice fruit salad and fresh cream. Oh, I forgot the green onions and radishes, which must be taken with cheese sandwiches. And, by the way, you can wash down your food with a bottle of good English beer."

The unpretentious supper tasted much better than any seven-course dinner that Horatio Johnbull had eaten in Calcutta or Premnagar. Everything was neat, clean and simple, and the environment itself was full of warmth and affection. After finishing his first glass of beer, Horatio Johnbull enquired. "By the way, old chap, where're the other members of the quartet this evening?"

Peter was in a flippant mood. "The fat one," he replied, "is engaged in the recovery of overdue rents and interest, and the lean one's addressing a stormy meeting of the railway strikers at the Swaraj Hall. In their respective passions for money and glory they

don't know what they're missing."

Lila had also cooled off from her political enthusiasm after the first glass of iced beer. She looked deliciously desirable in the flowing folds of her sari. Being temperamentally aggressive in her affections, she caught Peter by the arm, and said: "Peter-boy, do read some of your prose to Mr. Johnbull."

"I don't wish to spoil Mr. Johnbull's evening by flinging my sentimental rubbish at him," said Peter Mainwaring, in a tone which clearly indicated that he needed further persuasion. Horatio Johnbull did the rest of the coaxing; though Sorab was definitely opposed to the rehearsal of Peter's moonshine. He often said that Peter was a suitable case for psycho-analysis. There was no sense in letting him whine away about some imaginary houri from the proverbial paradise.

Undeterred by Sorab's damping remarks, Peter rushed into his small study, and brought back a typewritten manuscript. After turning over a few pages, he said: "I think I shall read something I wrote about Lila after our first meeting in the Shalimar Gardens on the occasion of the full moon picnic." In a semi-chanting voice he started reading his own prose.

"Thou art the divine symbol of my love," he almost sang out the words. "Thou art a living goddess. Why should I not worship at the altar of thy radiant charm?"

"Sympathy moves from thine heart and touches mine. Words find poetic expression through thy voice and create a swift melody in my ears. The music of thy presence reminds me of a long lost memory of my youth."

"Thine eyes glisten with love. A loving glance from those two eyes made softer by thy natural modesty will ease the longing of my starving soul."

Sorab interrupted the melody of Peter's prose at this stage and said: "I thought you had no longings of that kind. Moreover, let me assure you that Lila's eyes are fiercely luminous and positively unmodest."

"Don't be a damned fool, Sorab," said Lila impatiently: "Let Peter get on with his reading."

Peter breathed a sigh of relief and continued his reading. "Underneath thy slowly budding eyelids, there is a message from within. Let not thy rosy lips conceal what the eyes dare reveal. The message is mine. Let it flow unto my heart from a pair of eyes and a pair of lips.

"Thy pale hands are as tender as thy warm heart. In their tenderness, they speak to me in a gentle pressure, and thus unfold to me the mystery of thy heaving breast. Let them rest in mine to tell me the rest of their tale."

"Do shut up, Peter," said Sorab, "it's sheer lunacy. Lila's hands are no more tender than mine."

At this moment, the telephone bell rang mercilessly, and created a sudden breach in Peter's love song. He got up from the ottoman and went straight to the telephone in his study. "Hullo! Yes, it's Peter speaking,.....who? Manzoor, yes, go on." A brief pause and once again: "You've been arrested by the police. What on earth for? Oh, I see, for inciting the strikers to acts of violence and arson. You're a bloody fool. Why did you put your foot into the wrong hole?" Another brief silence. "You require legal assistance. Righto. Sorab and I'll start off for the scene of the crime." The voice on the other side of the wire said something about his misunderstanding the situation. Peter said: "I understand now; we shall drive straight to the police station and bail you out."

"Well, here's a spot of hard work for us, old boy," said Peter addressing Sorab. "Manzoor has obviously made a mess of things and wants your legal assistance at the police station." There was nothing unusual in Manzoor's behaviour and arrest, in so far as Sorab Pestonji, the lawyer, was concerned. He had pulled him out of many scrapes before, and this was only another experience of the same kind. Horatio Johnbull offered to accompany them, but Sorab assured him that

there was no need for his presence at the police station. "It would be very kind of you," said Sorab, "if you would drop Lila at her father's house in the Model Town."

A pleasant evening thus came to an abrupt end at a comparatively early hour, through the too daring harangues of the professional labour leader.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### ANY MORE TITLES PLEASE?

Sunday was a day of brilliant sunshine and unclouded warmth. It was a peaceful day, free from the attentions of the Senior Official who had been deputed to look after the progressive education of Horatio Johnbull in the spectacular aspects of provincial administration.

Soon after breakfast, Horatio Johnbull retired to his sitting room, and made up his mind to attend to arrears of correspondence, both personal and business, which he had not been able to deal with during the past week. He wrote a long letter to Cynthia Diehard, in which he told her all about his doings since their last meeting in Premnagar. He poured forth his sentiments and assured her that, although he had met many interesting people in Lahore, he had never been disloyal to her even in his most frivolous moments. He was thoroughly enjoying his stay in the capital of the Punjab. The people were singularly hospitable and genuinely vigorous, not only in appearance, but also in character. He was, however, disappointed to find that tawdry commercialism of the West was invading the very homes of the upper middle-classes. That "sweet vulgarity" which was once regarded as an asset of the vigorous north was giving place to the greasy mannerism of the enervating East. He was immensely interested in the forthcoming political developments and hoped to obtain a clearer vision of the situation during the next two weeks.

He continued writing letters for nearly two hours and wanted to finish his entire correspondence before

lunch. But he was not aware that a prominent citizen of Lahore was in search of an interview with him. Just as he was about to commence a fresh letter, his thoughts were rudely disturbed by the appearance of his servant who was carrying a visiting card on a small tray. He glanced at the card, asked the bearer to show the gentleman in, moved from his writing desk, walked to the middle of the sitting room and shook hands with the visitor.

"I'm afraid I can't pronounce your name properly," he said to the strange visitor.

The strange visitor wore a perfectly bleached and richly starched Punjabi turban on his head, and a brilliantly tinted reddish orange beard on his face. He was tall and well-built and carried his fifty years remarkably well. In fairly fluent English, but uncertain of his grammar, he replied: "My name is Khan Bahadur Dilbaz Khan, and I am a Rais, a Kursi Nashin, and a Sufed Posh of Lahore. My friend Lala Din Dayal recommended me to your attention, and I have come this morning to pay my respects to you."

"I'm glad to meet you, Khan Bahadur," said Horatio Johnbull; "but would you be kind enough to explain the nature of your profession as indicated by the words just mentioned by you? I hope you will forgive my ignorance of Urdu."

"It is very difficult to explain these words," answered the Khan Bahadur diffidently. "Rais is what you call a wealthy and honoured citizen of a town, a man who does not soil his hands like a menial." With a sudden inspiration, he hastened to add: "I know how to explain it. A Rais is a man who does not work for his living. He lives on his income from lands and rents, and enjoys a high social position."

But surely Rais is not a title granted by the Government?" asked Horatio Johnbull, who was still in the dark as to the real meaning of the word.

"No, not a title; but it is accepted by everybody as a.....", he hesitated at the proper word, "symbol of

civic honour and respectability." He reflected for a few moments, and having mentally tapped his vocabulary continued: "Kursi Nashin is an old title of the Mughal period, which means a person entitled to a chair in a Durbar. But now, any Indian gentleman who is offered a chair by English officials is called Kursi Nashin." There was another brief interval and then further explanations followed. "Sufed Posh is a term applied to a gentleman who wears white clothes. All these words are not official titles, but by use, they become marks of distinction."

"They're rather old-fashioned and confusing, aren't they, Khan Bahadur?" said Horatio Johnbull in a humorous manner.

"No Sir, they are not confusing," replied the Khan Bahadur promptly. "We Punjabis are loyal members of the British Empire, but we do not wish to give up our old titles and class distinctions. I made my fortune during the war by supplying clean and nourishing hay to the cavalry regiments. I collected thousands of recruits for our benign Government and I earned my title and my agricultural lands. I have prospered by my loyalty and my hard work. I am now a nominated member of the Council. Why should I not be different from other people who have neither lands nor titles?"

The Khan Bahadur was apparently satisfied with his brief oration, and expected applause from the listener. He thought that he had proved conclusively that a man's place in society was determined by the whiteness of his clothes and by his ability to sit erect and motionless in a Durbar chair. But Horatio Johnbull thought differently. He realised that all these appendages were relics of the Mughal glory and pomp. No sensible Punjabi would think of printing these utterly nonsensical words on a visiting card. It was a sure sign, either of inferiority complex or of commercial greed. Although specimens of this kind could not be taken seriously when judging the extent of political advance in India, yet it was necessary to study their

mental make-up. They might cause obstruction in the way of progress and act as a brake on the steady growth of democratic institutions. He decided to be diplomatic in order to get a clearer view of this man's mentality.

"I'm very glad to know that you're a nominated member of the Council," he said in an interested manner. "What's your attitude towards the New Constitution?"

"My attitude, Johnbull Sahib, does not matter," replied the Khan Bahadur. "Sirkar is our *Mai-Bap*, and they know what is good for us. I am troubled about the new elections. There are no more nominations, and I shall have to spend twenty thousand rupees on my election. But Allah be praised, I shall succeed. When my heart's desire is fulfilled, and I am made a Knight, I shall drop all the other titles and stick to my knighthood."

"Are you not interested in the welfare of the people of your province?" enquired Horatio Johnbull, realising fully that his visitor worried more about the addition of titles than about the people.

"Our Governor Sahib, our Commissioners and our loyal Ministers can do more for the people than a humble Khan Bahadur. I shall be quite happy if I get my knighthood and secure appointments for my two sons in the Civil Service. Let the people fight and settle their own disputes."

"That is a very convenient attitude towards politics," remarked Horatio Johnbull, "but I'm afraid it won't work out quite smoothly under the new conditions."

"My dear Johnbull Sahib," answered the Khan Bahadur, "you do not know our people. They are easily satisfied with committees and titles. When the masses become unruly and the leaders abusive, the Government appoints a committee to propose reforms. The members of the committee, and the officers advising them, sit for months and months discussing useless details. The masses become quiet

and the members get titles and all goes on as usual. That is the real trick."

"It is certainly not a trick confined to your province," said Horatio Johnbull, meditatively. "In all democratic countries, important issues are referred to committees of politicians and experts. But generally speaking, this method is not adopted with a view to shelving the issue. The appointment of a committee invariably indicates the seriousness of the investigation, and in the majority of cases Government not only accepts the findings of such expert bodies, but also introduces fresh legislation to eradicate the evil for which the committee was appointed. I'm surprised to know that, in the Punjab, serious subjects of public interest are treated as spare time hobbies."

The Khan Bahadur volunteered further information, and said: "If we only knew even one-third of what the Government wants us to find out we should never treat serious subjects as hobbies. When we do not understand the subjects, we have to leave it to the judgment of the experts. Our loyal duty is to attend the meetings."

"I suppose things will improve later on," observed Horatio Johnbull. "Democracy is still in its infancy in the Punjab. You've a great future before you, Khan Bahadur. You've glorious climatic conditions and a wonderfully fertile soil. You've a perfect system of transport and endless possibilities of development at your very door. Your people are vigorous and virile, capable of great sacrifices for the land of their birth. What you need badly is organisation and sound direction. With all her natural and physical advantages, your province should lead the rest of India in prosperity."

For a minute or two, Khan Bahadur Dilbaz Khan felt that the complimentary remarks made by Horatio Johnbull applied to him or to the people of his class. Although the M. P. had spoken so quickly that the Khan Bahadur could not catch every word of what he

said, he was convinced in his own mind that he had succeeded in creating a favourable impression on the mind of the distinguished member of the British Parliament. Encouraged by this conviction, he opened a bundle of papers wrapped in white muslin, and took out several testimonials and gilded certificates and placed them before Horatio Johnbull.

"I shall leave all these papers with you," he said respectfully. "Perhaps you may find time to go through them this afternoon. And if it pleases you, you might write out something better than all these, so that my knighthood may be assured in the next Honours List."

With a cynical smile on his face, Horatio Johnbull collected the heaps of testimonials, certificates, and other hand-written and typed guarantees of respectability, loyalty and ancestral greatness, and placed them carefully on his writing-desk. With a forceful shake of the hand, he said good-bye to the worthy Khan Bahadur, and thanked his stars for being able to get on with his correspondence and home mail. He was, however, glad that he was a good deal more enlightened on the philosophy of "clean clothes" by the unexpected visitor's simple explanation than by Carlyle's complicated logic in "Sartor Resartus."

## CHAPTER XXXV

### TOUTS, TEMPLES AND TRUMPETS

The Senior Official was in an energetic mood when he called on Horatio Johnbull on Monday morning. He had chalked out a programme for the day, and had arranged a special visit to one of the carpet factories, situated in the heart of the city of Amritsar, only a matter of about thirty-five miles by road from the winter headquarters of the Punjab Government. If Mr. Johnbull cared to see the Golden Temple, one of the seven wonders of India, he would be only too pleased to take him round and show him the historic monument of Sikhism. They could easily finish the entire programme in five hours, and if it suited Mr. Johnbull's convenience, they would start punctually at 1.30 p. m., after lunch and return to Lahore before seven in the evening. In the meantime, he would like to utilise the long interval in showing him the Museum and the Government Depot for the exhibition and sale of the arts and crafts of the province.

It was indeed a dreary and dismal business going from show-case to show-case and peeping solemnly and impressively at the statues of Buddha and other historical figures placed in the Museum. It was still more depressing to listen to the undiluted chatter of the curator who made a fine art of repeating mournfully the history, origin and the probable theme of the stone engravings lying peacefully on wooden stands. And it was positively disgusting to hear the tales of early Greeks who ran over some parts of Northern India and left behind a large crop of hybrid children and a larger crop of bi-lingual coins somewhere in the

North-east of Peshawar and South-west of Taxila.

Horatio Johnbull had no sympathy with the early Aryan hordes who marched into the Land of the Five Rivers, nor had he any particular affection for the Greeks who trampled on vast territories of agricultural land on the other side of the Indus. But as a matter of politeness, he listened to the uninteresting yarns of the curator for over an hour.

The depot for the exhibition and sale of arts and crafts was not so irksome as the Museum. There was human activity in it. There were also some tangible signs of man's imagination and craftsmanship, some living proofs of endless labour, inexhaustible patience and hereditary skill. Most of the articles were designed by modern artists and executed by cottage workers for sale in India and in Europe. Silk, ivory, ebony, copper, brass, silver and even gold played their respective parts in the production of beautiful works of art and utility. It was a wonderfully laid-out emporium with an endless variety of superb designs and textures. It was a great pity that its scope was not sufficiently enlarged to make it popular amongst all classes of the provincial population. Horatio Johnbull selected some hand-printed curtains and silk covers, a beautifully designed tea-set of beaten silver and a few lacquered pieces for internal decoration. After giving the salesman instructions as to the despatch of these articles, he rejoined the Senior Official, who was engaged in inspecting some pieces of modern furniture, designed and turned out in one of the local art schools.

The road journey to Amritsar was quite uninteresting till such time as the car carrying Horatio Johnbull and the Senior Official entered the outskirts of the city and passed along the long line of Government buildings reserved for the exclusive use of litigants, lawyers and judges. This area was a veritable bedlam. Ill-clad villagers, dhotied banias, trousered vakils and advocates and their clerks were rushing in and out of the law courts in search of justice and fair-



play. Petition writers were squatting on small square carpets and were writing out their clients' grievances on low wooden desks. Red-liveried peons were shouting down the sky with their hoarse cries, calling out plaintiffs and defendants. Anxious litigants were lying restlessly under the shaded trees awaiting the whims of the judges, and prospective clients were smoking *hukkas* and chatting uncereemoniously with greedy touts who had been instructed by their masters to fix lump-sum bargains on the basis of guaranteed success in litigation. Stamp vendors were doing a roaring business in court-fee stamps. And the hawkers were exchanging sweets and cigarettes for copper and silver coins.

It was an unusual sight for Horatio Johnbull, who had heard a great deal about litigation and corruption in the Punjab, but had never seen a similar sight before. He was wondering whether he should discuss a delicate subject like that with a Government official. The spectacle of a litigating humanity, however, encouraged him to seek further information on the subject.

"Is it true," he asked, "that the judiciary and the subordinate staff are thoroughly corrupt?"

At first, the Senior Official hesitated to answer a direct question of this nature, but after a moment's reflection, realised that corruption was no longer a state secret. "Yes, it is true," he answered, "but the authorities concerned are taking drastic measures to suppress corruption, and every effort is being made to uproot the evil. The chief difficulty is that ignorant and illiterate litigants are led astray by wicked touts who, not only fleece their clients, but also press them to bribe court officials and clerks. So long as ignorance prevails and litigation remains a passion with these people, it is extremely difficult to eradicate corruption."

"It's incredible that half a century of organised British administration should not be able to deal with corrupt practices," remarked Horatio Johnbull in a slow and sarcastic voice. The Senior Official remained silent, and the car moved on by a circuitous route

towards Hall Bazaar, the only wide thoroughfare in the romantic city of the Golden Temple.

Huge placards and posters appeared on the outer side of the city wall. "Beecham's Pills" and "Yogi's Undisturbing Purgative" were advertised in bold and flaunting letters. A very amusing poster in Urdu started Horatio Johnbull in the face. The figure of a man in early youth was clumsily painted in the centre of the picture, with a walking stick in his right hand and a labelled bottle of medicine in his left. The idea itself was amazingly funny. Here was a man who had lost all vigour and sexual vitality through the excesses of youth. The medicine advertised on the top of the poster was guaranteed to restore golden youth and sexual powers. Horatio Johnbull could neither read nor understand the meaning of the words printed on the top of the emaciated figure. He was, however, on the point of bursting into laughter when the Senior Official broke silence, and said: "Some enterprising firm is advertising Golden Pills for Sexual Potency."

"Is there no law against the publication of such obscene advertisements and misleading claims?" enquired Horatio Johnbull.

"No Sir, there is no law against publications of this kind," replied the Senior Official. "This placard is not half so disgusting as the advertisements which appear in some of our weekly and monthly journals in Urdu and Hindi. Quacks and charlatans advertise on a very large scale, in indecent language, their herbs, pills and special mixtures for the restoration of sexual powers and prolongation of the sexual act. They advertise remedies for the removal of sterility and guarantee the birth of a male child to a childless woman. The gullible public swallow all these fraudulent claims and waste their money in the purchase of useless, and at times, harmful medicines. It is almost a mania, not only in the Punjab, but in other parts of India as well, and it should be stopped by drastic measures at the earliest possible moment."

"I agree with you," said Horatio Johnbull, "that, in the interests of public health, the sale of obscure and dangerous drugs should be made a punishable crime. India's not the only country where people are sex-mad. If you read between the lines, you will find advertisements of a somewhat similar nature in some of the Continental papers. It seems to me that, next to war, sex is playing an ever-increasing part in the lives of the people. Everywhere, they're seeking increased sexual vitality, either through surgical operations or through gland secretions and herbs. In some cases, birth control is being used as a means of reckless and unfettered sensuality."

Passing through the main gate of the city, the car stopped on the right hand side of Hall Bazaar, and then turned into a narrow lane. The proprietor of the carpet factory stood outside the entrance with flowers and bouquets which he presented to Horatio Johnbull and the Senior Official in the usual Punjab style, and then conducted them into the oblong courtyard of his tumble-down carpet factory.

The carpet factory was like a grave-yard. There were no sounds barring those of the master weavers muttering mysterious instructions to their understudies. From a distance, these instructions sounded like the whispered prayers of devout mourners who had come to pay their last homage to the dead. There was no rattling noise of machinery anywhere in the whole building, nor was there any bustling activity of transport.

The long barrack in which the carpet looms were housed in a diagonal fashion was walled on one side and broken by dilapidated arched windows and doors on the other. It had a low roof and was divided into four sections containing twenty-five looms each.

The open oblong courtyard stretched from one end of the barrack to the other and had the appearance of a dreary and deserted gully. It formed a sort of blind alley at the lower end of the barrack. A small

dingy room was reserved for wool-dyeing operations, and another ventilated room was set aside for designers and draughtsmen. Old Persian patterns and modern English and American designs were drawn on graph paper and tinted by hand to show the various colour effects. These geometrical figures were converted into hieroglyphic ciphers which could be deciphered only by the master weavers in charge of the carpet looms. The latter sat on wooden benches near the folding beams and shouted out their stitches in their own mysterious slang. The boys who worked with them, at starvation wages, carried out their instructions and placed stitch after stitch in the vertically stretched warps and cut the loose ends of the woollen yarn with a semi-circular knife. This went on from day to day, from week to week, and from month to month till the carpet was ready for the final finishing touches of the supervising expert.

Children of ten and twelve were mercilessly employed in the carpet-making industry. Their pale brown faces and stooping backs showed the strains of a hard life. But, according to the respectable proprietor of the factory, it was absolutely necessary to train them in the art of weaving at a very early age, otherwise they would never acquire deftness and efficiency. Child labour was indispensable for the comforts and luxuries of the well-to-do.

After inspecting the working of a dozen looms, Horatio Johnbull turned round to the Senior Official and said: "Is there no possibility of abolishing child labour in carpet factories? Surely the sweated labour of these innocent children should not be employed to provide luxuries for the wealthier classes?"

"This point has been investigated by the various committees and commissions appointed by the Government from time to time; but unfortunately no suitable solution has been discovered so far, owing chiefly to the opposition of the factory owners. The general conditions of working are much better now than they were

ten years ago."

"Conditions are far from satisfactory even now," observed Horatio Johnbull, as he walked out of the dismal barrack into the open courtyard. According to the good old custom, the factory owner presented the honoured visitors with a silvered *pán* on a silver tray and also offered refreshments and drinks. After thankfully acknowledging the factory owner's hospitality, Horatio Johnbull and the Senior Official resumed their journey to the Golden Temple through the noisy confusion of Hall Bazaar.

The car moved slowly through the crowded street in the midst of hawkers' noises, shopkeepers' entreaties and the deafening trumpets of marriage processions. All sorts of people, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, women and children, Sadhus and beggars walked carelessly along the pavement without paying the least attention to the movement and direction of vehicular traffic.

At one place on the main thoroughfare, not far from a bank building, there appeared an unruly mass of excited human beings. Horatio Johnbull was unable to understand why these men were shouting at each other in a peculiar commercial jargon. At first he thought it might be the beginning of a communal riot so often reported in British papers. He couldn't suppress his curiosity: "What's all this fuss about," he enquired.

The Senior Official looked around, and after gazing at the crowd for a few moments, answered: "This is our miniature stock and produce exchange. They are buying and selling cotton, wheat, linseed, silver, gold and shares. There appears to be a boom in commodity prices, and that's why they are shouting at the top of their voices."

"Let's stop the car and watch the fun," said Horatio Johnbull.

Men were rushing in and out of the building with small slips of paper in their hands. Some of them looked mad with the excitement of anticipated victory, others down-hearted and depressed. Outside on the pavement,

there was a small crowd of dejected speculators consulting professional astrologers and palmists. For small offerings of four-anna pieces, the fortune-tellers were spinning out long yarns about the bright and promising prospects of their respective clients. The future, not only of the markets, but also of the down-trodden speculating humanity, was being unfolded by the readers of stars and palms in exchange for silver coins.

Horatio Johnbull watched these men with a certain amount of sympathy for their follies. "I wonder," he said philosophically, "if these foolish fortune-hunters realise that they're being duped by the financial gangsters of Bombay, London and New York."

"But they are in touch with all the leading markets of the world," said the Senior Official, "how can they be duped, Sir?"

• "There are sharks and share-pushers in Bombay and London. There are technical operators in Calcutta and New York. There are dealers in 'options' everywhere. All these people work in gangs, and in the long run, most of the money lost in local towns goes into their pockets. Unless you are in the inner ring and know the ropes, you can't make any money. It's a mug's game."

"It is spreading like wildfire in the Punjab," said the Senior Official in a communicative tone. "Almost anybody who can afford a flutter, goes in for speculation, without even knowing the meaning of 'bulling' and 'bearing.' Government servants are not allowed to dabble in business; but no one prevents them from losing money in contract bridge. Domestic servants and clerks indulge in betting on 'American futures' at the bucket shops, and the *bania* who accepts the bets gathers half the monthly wages in advance. I am told that, in spite of official restraint, gambling is spreading like wildfire in all parts of India."

• Horatio Johnbull listened to the observations made by the Senior Official with silent attention, and knowing them to be true did not wish to comment

further on the evil aspects of gambling. He simply remarked that the majority of people who gambled in share and produce markets wanted excitement. When they lost money in one market, they found a new form of excitement in another market. He was not concerned with the ethics of gambling, but he was surprised to find that, in nine cases out of ten, men lost their normal balance when they succeeded in squeezing money out of a rising or falling market. "The tragedy of speculation," he observed, "is that, when a man, through sheer chance or dishonest manipulation makes a fortune, he thinks that he's a born leader of commerce whom the world in general and the traders in particular should worship and admire."

From this living scene of speculation and astral influence, the car moved on through a series of narrow streets to the outskirts of the famous Golden Temple Tower, where it halted. According to the prevailing custom, Horatio Johnbull and the Senior Official took off their shoes and socks and put on fresh pairs of socks purchased on the spot.

From the terrace of the Clock Tower they descended into the spacious precincts of the Golden Temple—a solid mass of golden domes and marble placed in the middle of a huge artificial lake, bounded on each side by high walls and studded with marble footpaths and small projecting terraces for devout bathers. It was indeed one of the seven wonders of India; if India has only seven wonders and no more.

Horatio Johnbull saw the ardent followers of Guru Nanak paying homage to their religious scriptures and repeating evening prayers in the language of their forefathers. The temple priest explained to him that the first Guru had a remarkable spiritual foresight which enabled him to gather knowledge from the Vedas and other religious sources, and turn it into a practical creed, a simple code of moral life. He preached the doctrines of endless devotion in a living world, boundless service in the midst of crude materialism,

and true brotherhood in the conflicting antagonisms of life. He broke the hide-bound walls of caste and custom, and infused a new spirit of unity with God and the universe into the minds of his disciples.

From his conversation with the temple priest, Horatio Johnbull gathered that, but for the external symbols of Sikhism, the religion preached by Guru Nanak and the later Gurus would have spread far and wide throughout India, and the Far East.

It was abundantly clear from the facial expressions and behaviour of the devout worshippers that the fiery martial spirit inculcated in the minds of their forefathers by the last Guru had left permanent traces of heroism in the history of Sikhism. Horatio Johnbull was glad to learn that the Golden Temple had been recently liberated from the priest ridden orthodoxy of vested interests by the Akalis—a new and determined section among the Sikhs.

It was a great experience for Horatio Johnbull to walk around the sacred temple, to watch the High Priest reading passages from the Holy Book of the Sikhs, to see men, women and children making humble offerings in the cause of spiritual freedom and human welfare.

It was now after five o'clock in the afternoon. The Senior Official suggested that they should start their homeward journey. They got into the car, and after a slow and tedious drive through narrow streets and filthy lanes, passed out of the city wall and came to the Grand Trunk Road. Through rows and rows of whispering trees and the bright crimson glow of the setting sun, the car drove back to Lahore with its two tired passengers. The sun had already disappeared behind the deepening shadows of the western horizon when Horatio Johnbull reached Spagati's Hotel.



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE GENTLE ART OF LIVING

When a Senior Official in the Punjab is deputed by his chiefs to display the visible fruits of beneficent administration to distinguished visitors, he invariably overdoes his part by introducing too much theatricality and breathless action into the programme. He gives the unsuspecting victims no breathing space but simply rushes them about all over the place.

The next week was a hurricane of engagements. The Senior Official rushed Horatio Johnbull from place to place. Agricultural centres around the town, and state-owned demonstration farms in Lyallpur and other places were visited one after the other. The usual comments and explanations were heaped upon him wherever he went in search of information. The cold storage of potatoes and perishable seeds, the destruction of butterflies and locusts, the chemical treatment of diseased fruit-trees, the elimination of the boll-weevil from the cotton fields, the removal of wax from the sugar cane, the hybridization of plants, and the artificial fertilization of the soil were some of the subjects in which Horatio Johnbull received instruction. Chemical research laboratories where perfumed soaps, face powders, lipsticks, and a large variety of cosmetics were being experimented upon, were also visited.

The industrial education of women was the next item of the display. It was a subject which the authorities had taken up with vigorous beneficence in spite of the opposition of the orthodox elements in the local legislature. With a grandiloquent gesture the Hon. Minister had ruled out all possible objections and had

succeeded in staging a special masterpiece for the uplift of the weaker sex. Horatio Johnbull was called upon to witness how various useful crafts were taught to middle-class girls and deserted widows. Tailoring and needlework of all kinds, crochet, darning both visible and invisible, mending of old clothes, cooking and ironing, and other branches of domestic economy were being hurled at prospective brides of tender age. Even respectable housewives in their early twenties received a sort of post-nuptial training in painting, musical gymnastics and mechanical crafts.

When all the products of a truly beneficent Government had been inspected, the Senior Official turned his attention to hospitality through private and semi-official agencies. Luncheons and tea-parties were arranged by prominent titled citizens and Government contractors to meet the distinguished member of the British Parliament. Officials and non-officials were invited to bombard the honoured guest with all sorts of stupid and irrelevant questions. Eloquent speeches were made by verbose councillors on the political significance of Horatio Johnbull's independent mission in India. Hopes were expressed that he would take back with him, not only happy memories of his brief sojourn in their province, but also conclusive evidence of the progressive march of Indian nationalism. A quasi-leader of the commercial community declared that Mr. Johnbull's visit to the Punjab had created another strong link between Amritsar and Manchester. In one of the many crowded functions, he was warmly congratulated on the boldness of his task, on the vastness of his political vision, and on his personal charm. Horatio Johnbull thanked the speaker for the compliments paid to him and regretted his inability to say anything beyond the expression of gratitude and goodwill.

Sorab B. Pestonji was known for the sincerity of his personal friendships. Only a week ago, he advocated Manzoor Husain's cause and secured a summary dismissal of the police charge. The Magistrate held

that there was no evidence of sedition against the socialist, nor was there a spark of truth in the charges made by the police. The trial was over in less than an hour and the accused was profusely garlanded by friends, comrades and railway strikers.

Sorab's next anxiety was the physical welfare of his old friend Horatio Johnbull. The continued strain of listening to the technical trash of demonstrators and instructors was beginning to weigh heavily on the constitution of the roving politician. Sorab felt that a long week-end of rustic life, away from the depressing decencies of civilisation, would enable them to recoup their energies. In the hope of persuading Horatio Johnbull to accept his proposal, he secured the exclusive use of one of those luxurious rest houses which the irrigation engineers of Northern India provide generously for their officers and occasional guests.

The Superintending Engineer of the Northern Circle, being an active Rotarian, gladly acceded to Sorab's request and placed a suitable rest house situated on the upper banks of the river Jhelum at the disposal of the party. Horatio Johnbull welcomed the prospects of leisure and undisturbed peace in the midst of rural surroundings. It was arranged that the party, consisting of Horatio Johnbull, Peter Mainwaring and Sorab Pestonji, should leave for Jhelum on Friday, the 19th of February.

The train steamed out of the ramparts of the railway station at 9 a.m. and after gaining speed, rushed towards her northern destination. Horatio Johnbull heaved a sigh of relief. "It's refreshing," he said "to get away from those beastly tea-parties and dinners, even for a week-end."

"My dear lad," said Sorab, drawing his head inside from the window of the compartment, "one must pay in physical fatigue for one's popularity and social success. The higher you go the more energy you waste in useless social activities, not for personal gratification, but for purposes of—God knows what!"

Peter Mainwaring who was sitting on a huge cabin trunk in the middle of the passage, puffing away at a Burma cheroot, burst into hearty laughter at this remark. "Sorab," he said, "I always thought you were a blinking idiot, but now I'm convinced that you're something much worse. Can you tell me why an intellectual man should seek popularity and strive to go higher and higher in the social scale? Everybody knows that the higher the scale the greater the corruption, both moral and political. The continued formation of social groups, of higher groups and lower groups, of bureaucrats and millionaires, of tradespeople and commercial magnates, has brought about a vicious change in the attitude of human beings towards each other. Privileged sensuality, flippant irresponsibility and social terrorism are some of the obvious results of the popular acceptance of the higher social order. Instead of Christian charity and Islamic brotherhood, you've class snobbery all over the world. This is the result of your trying to go higher and higher in the social scale."

"But my dear boy," said Horatio Johnbull meditatively, "you can't check the formation of social grades at this stage of our civilisation, for the simple reason that, every aspect of life is becoming mechanised and commercialised—sexual intercourse, amusements and sports, home life, professional activity, and even religion. More than half the population of every country is perpetually struggling merely to keep alive and is therefore unable to afford mechanised luxuries, or even the bare comforts of life. The other half divides itself into several groups and subgroups according to the purchasing power of each group. The obvious result is that the tangled mess of social groups continues to become more and more entangled. Those who can afford to reach the highest pitch in mechanisation look down upon those on a lower level, and so on, till the lower middle-classes are reached. From the lowest to the highest, each class envies the

lot of the other in an ascending order. The possession of radios, motor cars and beautiful mistresses by the upper classes is resented by the lower classes and the ownership of historic castles by the aristocratic families is like wormwood to the *nouveaux riches*. There's a growing lack of contentment in the human race, and in my opinion, the mechanisation of society is largely responsible for the present mix-up."

Peter Mainwaring was impatiently listening to Horatio Johnbull's rhetoric. He was somewhat confused about the principle of mechanisation and its bearing on the iniquity of the existing social orders. He was convinced that the real root of the social trouble was the uneconomic distribution of wealth. "From your arguments," he said, "I infer that you're not pleased with the existing economic structure of society."

"No sane-minded person is pleased with 'the existing conditions,'" replied Horatio Johnbull. "At the same time, no one's prepared to apply the Russian technique to the institutions of the British Empire."

Sorab Pestonji who was partly responsible for this discussion, said: "A rationalised form of socialism, something quite different from Communism, should solve the problems of social and economic inequalities. I'm sure there's no scope for Bolshevik tactics in India. I do believe, however, that planned socialism would do the trick."

"Let me tell you, Sorab," answered Horatio Johnbull, "that very few people understand the real meaning of 'planned socialism.' And those who do, are such egotistic fools that they completely ignore the world conditions outside their own countries. They hold out promises which they're unable to fulfil and map out programmes which they're unable to carry out. I've no respect for planned programmes. Planning implies a logical process which does not take into account the unforeseen factors. Personally I believe in sound common sense and human sympathy, unencumbered by planned materialism."

"But surely there must be some logical scheme for the removal of these colossal differences in the economic levels of our people?" asked Sorab seriously, as if he were terribly moved by the sufferings of the working classes in India.

"I'm sure the people themselves would find a suitable remedy in the long run," answered Horatio Johnbull.

With a terrific rattling noise, the mail train sped on through the fertile fields of Gujranwala, and in less than two hours arrived at Wazirabad Junction. The usual swarm of flies over the sweetmeat stalls greeted the third-class passengers as they got down from their shabby compartments. Turbaned bearers with polished brass badges on their coats enquired if the Sahibs would have any refreshments. Travelling salesmen went from compartment to compartment, soliciting orders for cutlery and leather goods and walking sticks. Fruit-sellers walked from one end of the platform to the other several times in search of customers. Actually, the only hawkers who did any business that morning were those who sold roasted gram, puffed rice and sugared monkey-nuts.

After ten minutes, the train moved on again. Horatio Johnbull looked out of the window, saw the open fields and stagnant ponds, surveyed the landscape, turned his head inside, and said: "There isn't the same profusion of temples in the Punjab as in other parts of India."

Peter Mainwaring who was now sitting next to him said that the Hindus in the Punjab did not take religion as seriously as they did in South India. "I was once motoring," he related, "with a few friends from Madura to Tinnevely, and thence to Cape Comorin. All along the roadside and near the village tanks, we saw nothing but palm trees, paddy fields, temples and bare-bodied devotees. The Brahmins in particular seem to have a permanent alliance with the deity!"

"If the Hindus in the Punjab are not so religiously

inclined, why are there frequent Hindu-Muslim riots?" asked Horatio Johnbull.

"The origin of these ugly riots may be sought somewhere in the economic field," replied Peter Mainwaring. "Financial disparity is chiefly responsible for the eternal cry of communal representation in the councils and services."

"I'm afraid I cannot agree with you," Horatio Johnbull retorted. "Financial disparity may give rise to agitation for relief, but it has nothing to do with religious hatred. The latter is a form of fanaticism which, under certain conditions, does lead to murder and arson. So long as religion remains a matter of the personal equation and personal spiritual experience, it harms nobody, but when it becomes an organised social force and goes beyond its true functions, it creates ugly situations. I think it's the overriding of this personal element that causes riots and upheavals."

Sorab was not interested in religious conflicts. He was quite satisfied with the moral laws and rituals prescribed by Zoroaster centuries ago. He therefore didn't worry his head about the real causes of religious disturbances and refused to listen to the uninteresting discussion. He went off to sleep in his upholstered seat and spent the rest of the journey in mild and musical snoring.

The mail train arrived at Jhelum after 1 p. m. The party landed at the platform and was greeted by a smart Sub-Divisional Officer of the Irrigation Department. After finishing a substantial lunch at the railway refreshment room and resting their bodies in the retiring room, they got into the car provided by the S. D. O. and drove along the riverside on a beautiful road for miles and miles.

The Rest House was situated in a gorgeously picturesque locality at a distance of about forty miles from Jhelum. The distant landscape in the background was formed by the sloping ravines of the outer range of one of those majestic hills which seem to guard the

valley of Kashmir against the ruthless approach of modern mechanised transport. On the right, the winter currents of the river flowed slowly and noiselessly, and on the left, the growing crops in the fields presented the picture of a heaving sea with greenish golden waves. There was perfect peace and calm everywhere around the solitary bungalow. The only audible sounds were those of the nightingales singing their native songs and of the rustling leaves blown away by a soundless breeze. There were miles and miles of footpaths radiating from the main road and the cultivated fields and ending near the Rest House.

There was ample accommodation for three visitors, and all the culinary arrangements had been previously made by the Sub-Divisional Officer. After dinner, the members of the week-end party spread themselves lazily in arm-chairs in the open lawn facing the front veranda. As they smoked their Manilla cigars and blew out rings of smoke into the clear air of the garden, they seemed as though pervaded with a romantic lassitude. The glorious feeling of oneness with the immediate environment produced in them almost that kind of intoxication which champagne of fine vintage can produce. The cool radiance of the waxing moon, broken here and there by the shadows of wavering trees and passing clouds, enhanced the soothing effect of the floral surroundings. They felt as though they had crawled out of a musty ghetto into the sweetly-scented garden of the proverbial paradise.

All of a sudden, their meditation was disturbed by a series of musical sounds which emanated from the river bank. Horatio Johnbull opened his eyes. "Hullo! There's music in the air," he said. "I wonder who's treating us to melody at this time of the night?"

Sorab was not particularly pleased with this unsolicited entertainment. He, however, opened his eyes, re-lit his cigar and answered: "I suppose the village people are celebrating the incoming of Spring. They usually do that sort of thing after Basant Panchmi, that



is, the day on which the rigours of winter are supposed to come to an end."

"Let's walk down to the river bank and see the celebrations," suggested Horatio Johnbull, fully awake to a new and pleasing situation.

Unwillingly, and somewhat sleepily, Peter Mainwaring heaved himself out of his arm-chair and walked with his companions, through a narrow footpath, towards the scene of rustic celebrations about a mile down the river.

The scene was gloriously simple and truly pastoral. Free from the toils of tilling and untrammelled by the hazards of harvests, men, women and children were sitting on grassy mounds and amusing themselves in a variety of simple and unaffected ways. Unaccompanied by any musical instrument, and assisted only by a resonant empty earthen pot, they were singing songs of Hir and Ranja--of their love and valour. Soft melodies, unhampered by the rigid discipline of a modern Indian orchestra, filled the fragrant air of the river bank, and the sweet whisperings of the indolent flow of the river added to the rhythm of their rural music. It was a scene of peaceful sadness and subdued gladness, for it depicted a spontaneous combination of love, reverence and thanksgiving. It was the music of simple folks, living a simple life and interpreting their emotions in folklore and popular tunes. It was a simple art, an artless art which laid bare the nakedness of their unpretentious lives, an art which depicted in terms of simple melody their struggles of love and hatred, their likes and dislikes and their ideals and ambitions.

It was the first occasion in India, on which Horatio Johnbull was brought into conscious touch with the harmony and happiness which the simple village folks had been able to introduce into their lives by a process of cheerful suffering and unaffected tolerance for each other. He saw at once that these people had developed a simple art of living in which faith and charity played a more important part than reason and greed.

They laboured on the land in anxious anticipation of its fertility. They drank their butter-milk and ate their frugal meals in childish delight. In their moments of relaxation, they played, danced, clapped their hands, and sang songs of love and life. Although they represented three-fourths of India's population, they had very little in common with the town dwellers of Bombay, Calcutta and Lahore. They lived in a world of their own, a world of action and stark reality, and yet a world full of dreams and sweet phantasies. The only records they left behind for the historian to chronicle were the progressive returns of crops and agricultural produce.

On their return journey to the Rest House, Horatio Johnbull stopped in the middle of the footpath, and remarked: "These people know the gentle art of living. I think it'd be an unforgivable sin to thrust mechanisation on them."

Peter Mainwaring could not get over his scheme of rationalised socialism. On hearing Horatio Johnbull's remarks, he reverted to his favourite theme, and said: "These people are exceptionally fortunate in having a highly organised system of irrigation. What about the cultivators in other parts of India, most of whom can't get two square meals a day? A hungry family can't afford to indulge in sing-song and artistic living. They need mechanisation to help them in filling their bellies. They want freedom from the clutches of money-lenders and parasitic landlords and blood-suckers."

Horatio Johnbull walked on without refuting Peter's remarks. There was no sense, he thought, in resuming an academic discussion at that time of the night. They were all healthily tired, and after arriving at the Rest House found that sleep was indeed a refreshing remedy for all the ills of mankind.

Enticed irresistibly by the sunny silence of a bright blue sky, they spent the whole of Saturday in tramping through fields and bushes, in jumping heedlessly over shallow streams, in watching cows and buffaloes grazing

in pastures, in witnessing the simple agricultural operations of the farmers on their small patches of holdings, and in looking at the performance of simple domestic duties by young girls and elderly women in their little thatched huts.

In the evening, over their whiskies and sodas, they indulged in light conversation at first, and then unconsciously drifted into the fields of sociology. Horatio Johnbull watched the blood-red glow of the declining sun behind the stately trees, and became mildly pensive. "In spite of Peter's objection to their simplicity and blissful ignorance," he said, "I must admit I was much impressed with the life and work of the village people. Their language sounds harsh and vulgar, but their faces show sincerity, sympathy and sweet melancholy."

"I agree with you as to their undoubted sincerity and affectionate nature," said Sorab in a modulated voice. "Their language, though harsh, is as vigorous as the people themselves; but no one can pick up the correct intonation unless he is born and brought up in these parts. As to vulgarity, let me assure you that no one bothers about polished refinement in the rural Punjab. They do, however, attach considerable importance to chastity and sense of honour."

"Both the latter qualities are obviously neglected by our heroic middle classes," remarked Peter Mainwaring, with a jeering emphasis on the word "heroic". "They're neither sweetly vulgar nor vigorously sincere. The lower scale in particular is perhaps the most miserable in the Punjab. They must wear fashionable clothes and take their wives to cinemas and musical entertainments. They must buy cheap trinkets for their womenfolk and educate their children in snobbish schools. They must spend enormous sums on marriages and dowries, and they must make a show of their respectability and popularity by spending large sums of money on sacred thread ceremonies and circumcisions. They must indulge, at least occasionally,

in wine and women to display their 'sporting' habits. They must put on insincere smiles in the presence of their Burra Sahibs to exhibit their loyalty and learning. And all this must be done on a grand salary of one hundred rupees per month. No wonder they have to live a life of 'civilised' slavery and moral turpitude. Allah alone can save their souls."

"But my dear Peter," Sorab almost shouted out, "it's not the fault of the lower middle classes that they have to cringe so low to display their respectability. It's the fault of the system which drags them down to a state of abysmal ignorance."

"No system on earth can force people into an attitude of cheap superiority and feigned respectability," answered Peter in a forceful tone. "No, Sorab my lad, the defective nature of the social system wouldn't wash their sins. There's something inherently odious about their behaviour. As hangers-on of capitalism, or even as hired servants of the Crown, they needn't regard themselves as custodians of public respectability and prestige. As desk scribblers and bribe-takers they needn't put on superior airs and treat the working classes as social pariahs."

Horatio Johnbull was wondering how far Peter's remarks applied to the social behaviour of the lower middle classes in England. He recalled to his mind the early struggles of the working classes against capitalism and the patronising attitude of the middle classes. After a brief hesitation, he said: "With an increased understanding of the principles and blessings of democracy, the conditions of social behaviour in this country are bound to improve. We had, as *you* know, similar manifestations in our own country right up to the first decade of the present century, but fortunately, the social clash between the working and middle classes has gradually lost its old sting during the last twenty years. I think I'm justified in predicting that, when the masses have risen to a higher economic level, the pretentious and assumed superiority of the lower middle

classes would disappear."

"I very much regret my inability to accept your predictive statement," announced Peter Mainwaring in a professional style. "Knowing them as I do, I've no hesitation in saying that the masses can't rise to a higher economic level until the lower middle classes are either destroyed altogether or re-educated in the ideals of national service. And since their destruction is obviously against the law of the land, the only other alternative is to break down the vicious line of class resistance by forcing manual labour on them."

"If you do that," said Sorab, "They'd probably commit mass suicide and leave behind a trail of unwanted women and children."

"I should imagine that mass suicide would be the easiest solution to the problem," replied Peter with a touch of brutal sarcasm in his voice. \*

Horatio Johnbull was still groping in the dark and looking for a tangible solution to the problem under discussion. It occurred to him that the diversion of the lower middle classes from clerical occupations to agricultural pursuits might solve the difficulty. "There's plenty of land available in the Punjab," he said. "Why don't they take to farming?"

"Simply because commodity prices are low and the cultivable land is in the hands of land-owners and leaseholders," answered Sorab promptly.

"That may be true," interrupted Peter Mainwaring, "but why don't you frankly admit that our 'heroic' middle classes don't wish to soil their hands with mud and manures. They're definitely averse to sun-bathing and simply dread the idea of turning their sallow complexion into healthy brown."

The Sub-Divisional Officer was a very busy man. On week days, he was generally engaged in various onerous tasks. For instance, he was supposed to measure (in cusecs) the quantity of water issued to the cultivators for irrigation purposes. He was expected to attend to the repairs of drain channels and the

construction of embankments, and to look after fresh excavations and dredging operations. And finally, he had to dabble in the literary task of filling up his official diary with imaginative accounts of his daily deeds.

On Sunday, he was entirely free from the burdens of his routine duties, and so he came to the Rest House to pay his respects to the honoured guests, and to take them out to the works to show them the marvellous achievements of modern engineering in general, and of his own department in particular. He was so ostentatiously proud of having risen from the rank of an ordinary chainman to that of a First Class Officer that he talked about nothing but culverts, drains, sluices and bridges. He told them how, in the early days, he taught young engineers the practical uses of theodolites and levels; how, without knowing trigonometry, he measured distant angles; and how he saved the Government from the dishonest practices of contractors who made out fabulous bills and submitted false accounts of earth-works and dams.

Apart from getting an inkling of the working of the Irrigation Department, Horatio Johnbull learnt nothing new on Sunday. He forgave the S. D. O. for his incorrigible enthusiasm in loudly advertising the glories of his department. It wasn't his fault. Almost every Government official whose promotion and career depended more on the whims of a superior officer than on merit was inclined to exaggerate his devotion to duty. His profession dragged him into an inescapable and narrow corner and he couldn't be expected to possess that larger vision of life which experience in bigger fields alone could offer.

On Monday morning, soon after a late breakfast, Sorab Pestonji and party left for Lahore, and returned to the stuffy atmosphere of the smoking lounge of Spagati's Hotel some time in the evening.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE SHADOW OF DEATH

In the hurried, bustling and inconveniently vigorous life of Lahore, the long week-end in the alluvial plains of Jhelum seemed like a distant dream to Horatio Johnbull. Accustomed as he was to a world of shifting scenes, he soon plunged himself into the vortex of the throbbing life around, and set himself to the task of arranging his future programme.

The Senior Official called on him once again on Wednesday, and enquired if he should proceed with the arrangements connected with his tour in the North-Western Frontier Province. The situation in the border districts was far from satisfactory, and the independent tribes beyond Landi Kotal and surrounding areas were always restless and undependable. The military posts were, however, properly fortified, and there was no visible danger to the lives and properties of tourists and occasional visitors. At the same time there was nothing particularly interesting in the Frontier to justify the likely hazards of travelling in turbulent areas.

At this stage of the discussion, the Senior Official became more illuminating. He explained that, politically speaking, the province was still backward and uninteresting. There were, he said, vast agricultural and industrial possibilities, but these could not be tapped owing to the perpetual fear of hostile raids and tribal attacks. The people were strong, healthy and vigorous, but deplorably unreliable in some of their habits. Considered in the light of modern civilization and national culture, it seemed to the Senior Official that the praises showered upon the Pathans by some

British authors were definitely undeserved. In view of the complicated nature of the prevailing situation, he, the Senior Official, was doubtful of the advisability of paying a visit to the Frontier. It rested with Mr. Johnbull to accept or reject his advice. If he should make up his mind to proceed with the plan, the Senior Official was confident that the Local Government would be only too pleased to give him such facilities as he may require during his stay in Peshawar.

On Thursday evening, Sorab Pestonji and Manzoor Husain walked into Horatio Johnbull's sitting-room for a chat and a drink. He was glad of this intrusion, as it gave him the opportunity of discussing the question of his intended trip to the Frontier with his two friends. After a general talk about the prospects of the various parties in the elections, he adroitly changed the subject of conversation, and started making enquiries about the real situation in the Frontier.

"I've read and heard so much about the Frontier," he said, "that I should feel guilty of cowardice if I were to postpone my visit to Peshawar and Landi Kotal. It seems to me that all this senseless, murderous warfare could be stopped and peace restored once for all if the present policy were carefully revised. The ruthless suppression of an armed revolt by super-armed forces can only establish temporary peace."

Manzoor Husain knew the conditions rather intimately. He had a smattering knowledge of Pushto and Persian and had visited Peshawar and the surrounding villages several times. Moreover, he had a certain measure of religious sympathy with the people of the Province, both Hindus and Muslims. "I should imagine a personal visit to the Frontier would be invaluable," he opined.

Horatio Johnbull asked him further questions. "Is it true," he enquired, "that the Afridis are in the regular habit of committing robberies and kidnapping women and children?"

"They have committed acts of violence in the



past," admitted Manzoor Husain. "I believe they are still inclined to indulge in loot and plunder. But what can the poor devils do when their crops fail and they have to starve in their primitive caves and unsheltered huts? Gnawing hunger and continued lack of occupation leads to pillage and plunder even in the most civilised communities. The Frontier Government should have poured capital into land and industry. Neither the Bania, nor the Marwari, nor the local people who made fortunes in the supply of mules and camels to the military authorities, would invest a single penny in the development of industries. An organised Government alone can provide the people with suitable industrial and agricultural occupations. If they do that, they would have peace, prosperity and goodwill; otherwise the present guerilla warfare would go on indefinitely."

Horatio Johnbull was impressed with Manzoor's militant logic. He also felt that the Frontier Government should have taken steps to divert the energies of the people to peaceful industrial occupations by granting subsidies and other forms of state aid. He was more than ever convinced that a personal visit to the Frontier would not only be interesting but also instructive from the point of view of political knowledge. Addressing Sorab, he said: "And what does your oracle say about my intended visit?"

Before Sorab had time for reflection, a message-boy rushed into the room with a pink envelope in his hand. It was a telegram. Horatio Johnbull almost snatched it from the boy's tiny hands and opened it with an air of concern. It was a telegraphic message from Cynthia and read as follows: "Father died heart failure at ten this morning. Please come immediately—Cynthia."

To a man of Horatio Johnbull's balanced disposition, the first shock of the sad news was unusually great. He could not utter a single word for a few minutes, and then realising the gravity of the situation and Cynthia's mental condition, he made up his mind at once. "That settles it," he said in a choked voice. "I

must rush off to Delhi at once. Sir David Diehard, an old friend of the family, died this morning and poor Cynthia is all alone to mourn his death. Sorab, be a good chap and ask the booking-clerk to reserve my seat in the mail, which, I believe, leaves at about 10. p.m. I've still got three hours at my disposal and I shall finish my packing long before the train starts."

Sorab rushed off to the telephone box in the manager's office, and Manzoor sat horrified with the sudden shock of the sad news. When Sorab returned, Horatio Johnbull was already gathering up papers, reports, blue-books and maps and putting them into a large compressed fibre trunk. His servant was packing up everything else in great haste. After giving the necessary instructions to the Hotel clerk, he turned round to Sorab, and said, "I'm afraid I shall have to cancel all my engagements for this week. You don't mind explaining matters to the people concerned?" He handed over a list of his engagements to Sorab, and finally added: "I'm really grateful to you and your friends for all that you've done for me. But for this terribly sad affair, I should've enjoyed your company for another week at least. Do say good-bye to everybody on my behalf."

No. 13, Roshanara Road, New Delhi, the official residence of the famous police chief, was plunged in the gloom and despair of the sudden bereavement on Friday, the 26th of February 1937. Even the household servants whom Sir David had fed, clothed and protected for years were in deep mourning. The shadow of death had cast its indelible impress on their sad faces. Instead of moving about with their usual readiness, they were hanging around the death chamber with bent heads and vacant looks. They felt as if they had been suddenly struck with lightning and lost the use of their limbs. Despite strict discipline, despite occasional rebukes and fatherly harshness, their master had always been kind, forgiving and generous. They had always relied upon his generous donations whenever they were

threatened and harassed by greedy money-lenders. And now, they and their children were left without protection and support. The butler, the cook, the dhobi, the sweeper, the syce and the motor driver were all thrown into unemployment by the sudden death of their benevolent master.

Cynthia was simply stunned by this sudden blow of destiny, delivered rather mercilessly at a very inopportune moment. This was the second time in her life when she understood the real meaning of death. Her mother's untimely demise had not caused so much grief and mental suffering, as, at that time, she was far away from the death-bed in the more cheerful surroundings of a boarding-school. But this was a terrible blow. Ever since her return from England, she had begun to love her father dearly and intimately and now, death had snatched away the one person she loved most in life. In spite of differences of opinion and behaviour, in spite of the old man's political and social eccentricities, she had always managed to bring him round to her own point of view. She had shaken the very foundation of his rigid conservatism by a slow process of filial devotion. Only a week ago, she had persuaded him to bring about permanent reconciliation between Indumati Azadali and her father, Rai Bahadur Khisku. The latter had listened sympathetically to the advice of his old friend and colleague, Sir David Diehard, and had forgiven his daughter for the unpardonable sin she had committed in marrying a Muslim socialist. She had scored other seemingly impossible victories over her father's personal prejudices and political dogmas, and had made life so wonderfully pleasant for him that he had long forgotten the unbearable loss of his dearly beloved wife. Through happiness, contentment and an amiable attitude towards life, she had grown out of her childish prettiness into the radiant loveliness of womanhood. And now there was a sudden break in that harmony of life which she had learnt to cherish during the last few years. She was utterly sad and

heart-broken and could not bring tears of consolation into her eyes. It was the despairing grief of a young woman who had suddenly lost a dear friend, a loving father and a loyal companion.

Horatio Johnbull tried his utmost to take Cynthia out of the sorrowful lethargy to which she had succumbed since her father's collapse in the drawing-room on the previous day. By soothing words and affectionate devices, he tried to divert her attention from the scenes of the past. It was, he argued, a blessing in disguise for a man to pass into the unconsciousness of eternity by sudden heart-failure. Long and painfully protracted illness was a curse not only for the sufferer, but also for those who watched the fearful approach of death by the bed-side. He felt desperately sorry for her, but the gravity of the situation demanded courageous suffering and cheerful resignation to the will of the unknowable Creator who held the secret of the span of human life in his own hands. "The very uncertainty of life," he said, "is the test of our love for those whom we adore throughout our lives." By all possible arguments and sympathetic references to the unceasing sorrows of humanity, Horatio Johnbull tried to console his bereaved fiancée. But the shock was so sudden and deep-seated that nothing but the passage of time could remove its mark.

Mourners poured in. The final preparations for an official burial were completed. The body of the imperial police chief was gently placed into the coffin, and the coffin itself was solemnly conveyed to the hearse and covered with a large Union Jack and wreaths. Drawn by two black horses and followed by a large number of carriages containing the chief mourners, the hearse moved out of the official residence of the late Sir David Diehard and sped on towards the last resting place—the European cemetery of the Imperial City. The funeral procession was attended by the Viceroy's A.D.C. and almost all the high officials of the Imperial Secretariat. All police and military honours were accorded

to the memory of the man who gave his life to the Empire in the full discharge of his duties and served his country well in the best light of his own knowledge and experience.

As a mark of respect to his memory all Government and Municipal Offices were closed for the day. Innumerable messages of condolence were received by Cynthia Diehard during the rest of the week, and a large number of her friends and admirers called on her to share her grief. Indumati and her husband, Azadali, paid frequent visits to No. 13, Roshanara Road, to divert Cynthia's attention from tragic thoughts of her father's death. Rai Bahadur Khisku was so deeply grieved that he forgot all about his own worries and came over frequently with his daughter and son-in-law to ascertain if Cynthia needed any assistance.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE

The merciful passage of time brought solace to the grief-stricken heart of Cynthia Diehard. The relentless stroke of death subsided into an inevitable misfortune which all human beings must suffer sooner or later. She went through her father's papers and collected all the important documents connected with his Provident Fund, Insurance, investments and his will. With the combined assistance of Horatio Johnbull and her father's lawyer, she completed the legal formalities for proving the last testament and putting her financial resources in proper hands.

New Delhi was once again the scene of hectic political and social activity. The Central Assembly was engaged in the unpleasant task of dissecting and criticising the Annual Budget. The endless chain of departmental demands presented by the Finance Member under various unintelligible and mysterious heads of expenditure was being subjected to the pressure of party politics. Intelligent members of the opposition were pouring thoughts and energies into the complicated statements of accounts, and the unintelligent members were exercising their cunning in inventing meaningless invectives to display their political importance to their distant electors. Barring attacks on military extravagance and the rupee-sterling ratio, there was nothing of importance, even for intelligent members to discuss or to condemn. It was, however, considered necessary in national interests to hack the Treasury Benches to pieces and to fling mud at them whether they deserved it or not.

There was also considerable excitement over the results of the provincial elections under the New Constitution. The position of the Unionist Party in the Punjab was unassailable, as they had secured a clear majority over the other parties. The local representatives of the National Mirror were not strong enough, politically, financially and intellectually, to form an aggressive opposition. Bombay, Madras and the United Provinces had scored roaring national victories. Bihar, Orissa and the Central Provinces also came out of the struggle with flying national colours. Bengal, Assam and Sind returned mostly communal and special representatives. The national group had put up a bold fight and had succeeded in winning the confidence of the voters in six out of the eleven provinces. The All-India Muslim Association had failed to display an organised attack in the political field. They had, however, succeeded in creating an atmosphere of ordered harmony in the ranks of the Muslim intelligentsia. New Delhi was therefore full of excitement, political fervour and national zeal in the first three weeks of March.

The Princely Order had not remained in the background. From their ever-flowing stream of wealth—whether borrowed, stolen or acquired, the independent rulers of quasi-independent states had poured gold mohurs into the pockets of legal experts and financial giants, to advise them on the implications and complications of the Federal Scheme. Batches of British experts on questions relating to the ultimate effect of the Federal Constitution on the divine rights of the rulers were motoring from palace to palace, from office to office and from hotel to hotel in search of definite instructions from their princely clients. Sir Ananda Kumarswamy appeared to be the busiest of them all. He was not only hobnobbing with the Prime Ministers of Indian States, but was also creating a dazzling atmosphere of his own legal importance in the princely world. In consultation with the British legal

luminaries, he was settling the terms and conditions governing the Instruments of Accession, and was also analysing, discussing, accepting and rejecting the long list of Federal subjects entrusted to his care by the innocent advisers of Indian States. By a curious irony of fate, the Princely Order could not make up their sleepy minds about the ultimate suitability of the provisions contained in the Act. Provincial autonomy was staring them in the face, and the All-India Federation was slowly rising from the eastern horizon, and still these royal gentlemen of ancient lineage were indulging in hair-splitting futilities. Perhaps they thought that procrastination and legal confusion might postpone the evil day.

The National Mirror was once again rousing itself into activity. The questions of national pledges and policies had to be settled. The country was prepared for sound national administration. They had secured majorities through their wonderfully organised and highly mechanised campaigns. They were now faced with the question of office acceptance. They must decide the issue one way or the other. Would national honour demand further sacrifices, or should they co-operate with the Governors in forming national ministries? Would they achieve their ideal of national independence if they accepted office and ran the machinery of administration under the New Constitution? These were the burning questions of the day. They had to grapple with the reality of political power. It was an unpleasant task. They were not sure of their struggle with the established forces of Indian bureaucracy and were afraid of failure.

While Cynthia Diehard was engaged in the disentanglement of her legal and financial affairs, Horatio Johnbull had ample opportunities of meeting the leaders of the various communities, of eliciting their views, and of obtaining a picture of the various political conflicts with which India was faced at that time. There was an apparent calm on the surface, but



there was inner tension throughout the country. The minority communities, that is, the Muslims, the Anglo-Indians, the Christians, the Parsis, and the so-called depressed classes were afraid of the growing power of the extremists in the national group, and also of the socialists who were already coming out with Utopian programmes and promises for the uplift and amelioration of the working classes. It was hardly possible for Horatio Johnbull to read the inner thoughts of the people, but he was able to feel the national pulse which indicated that behind all the petty jealousies and religious and racial antagonisms, the nation as a whole was anxious to present a unified front and to launch upon constructive action.

When the fervour of political investigation was over, Horatio Johnbull turned his attention to personal affairs. Sir David's sudden death had intensified his protective love for Cynthia. He couldn't possibly allow her to return to England all alone, and to await his arrival there. The changed conditions demanded a changed programme of life. He must ask Cynthia to marry him at the earliest possible opportunity.

One evening, about a fortnight after Sir David's death, he was sitting in the drawing-room of No. 13, Roshanara Road, discussing with Cynthia the problems of the immediate future. He was in a sentimental mood, and she was just beginning to show signs of recovery from the after-effects of her recent bereavement. Slowly and affectionately he caught her hands and held them in a peaceful, loving grip. He looked at her admiringly for a minute or two, and then said: "Cynthia darling, don't you think we should get married soon and return to England as husband and wife?"

In view of her mourning and deep-seated sorrow, she hesitated to give an immediate answer. After a brief reflection, she found words to convey her thoughts. "I agree," she said, "but on one condition—that we get married according to civil law. I couldn't possibly go through a church marriage just now."

At first he smiled and then laughed like a child. "You're a big baby, sweetheart," he said, "I never suggested for a moment that we should go thro' a religious ceremony under the present circumstances. Of course we shall go to the Registrar and ask the old Johnny to legalise our love. We don't need the blessings of the church and the prayers of the priest for our connubial happiness."

The wedding was arranged for Thursday, the 18th of March at 11 a. m. Mr. and Mrs. Azadali, Rai Bahadur Khisku, Peter Mainwaring, Sorab Pestonji and three English friends from the Secretariat, were duly informed of this. But as usual, the news of the forthcoming marriage leaked out through some mysterious channels, and on the due date, the senior staff of Sir David's department mustered in full uniformed strength at the Registrar's office.

The actual ceremony was simple and yet effective. The oath was administered by the venerable gentleman who was appointed by the Government for the express purpose of sanctioning and registering civil unions, regardless of caste, colour and creed. The marriage register was duly signed by the parties concerned and unduly witnessed by respectable witnesses from both sides. The wedding ring was placed on the proper finger and a stamped certificate was handed over to Cynthia. Underneath an archway of police batons, the couple marched out of the registry office as Mr. and Mrs. Johnbull.

A simple wedding breakfast was arranged for ten people at Hotel Celina. Toasts were drunk and congratulations were offered to the happy married couple. In the evening, Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Johnbull left for Mussoorie, where they spent some of the happiest days of their lives in the midst of snow-clad hills and tree-clad valleys.

The honeymoon ended on the 30th of March. Horatio Johnbull had already received an invitation from a prominent millowner of Ahmedabad, who was

extremely anxious to display his industrial talents to the distinguished member of the British Parliament. As Cynthia was also anxious to peep into the organisation of the textile industry, they left for Ahmedabad for a week's visit before their departure for England.

And thus they began a fresher life and a richer existence in thought and action, and formed a team of two till eternity.

**PART SIX**  
**THE BEEHIVE OF INDUSTRY**



## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE ARISTOCRATIC MILLOWNER

Seth Manilal Hirabhai was a man of meagre education but substantial pretensions. Before reaching the dreary landmark of fifty years he had, through luck and pluck, acquired a vast fortune and established himself as a prominent millowner in Ahmedabad. The word "millowner" was sacred to him. It applied only to those enterprising "managing agents" of cotton manufacturing concerns who had been duly appointed by the shareholders as secretaries and agents, and who had acquired sufficiently large holdings of shares to ensure a majority vote at all times, and at all general meetings of the company. Whether these holdings were acquired by speculative "corners," or by declaring losses and withholding dividends, did not matter to Seth Manilal's moral code. According to him, any "managing agent" who commanded a majority in the shareholders' meetings and was in a position to boss the directors, was good enough to belong to the noble and aristocratic order of millowners.

His frequent trips to England, and to the Continent of Europe had enabled him to pick up sufficient technique to apply, what he described as "modern methods of production," to his group of six cotton mills. His admiration for the mechanical genius of the white man was almost a mania. Whenever circumstances permitted, he brought back with him from Europe, either a German or an English spinner to manage his concerns. Indians were not exactly neglected in these appointments; but he believed that a white man was always better equipped and more dignified than an Indian, and

was therefore in a better position to supervise the working of a big department. And since the cost of living of European foremen was always more than that of Indian managers he considered himself justified in paying lower salaries to his Indian officers.

Seth Manilal Hirabhai was a business man at heart, though he posed as a staunch nationalist in political meetings and national gatherings. Externally, he lived the life of an Indian *Shethia*, but internally he not only admired English customs but actually lived like an English aristocrat. He had a tremendous personal establishment organised, more or less, on pseudo-Western lines with slight oriental touches here and there. He was superbly hospitable to foreign visitors and infinitely generous to those who were in political power.

He was a man of medium height and olive complexion, and from his forbears he inherited well-defined features and two sparkling eyes which lost their usual lustre under the shade of horn-rimmed spectacles. To the world at large, he looked fairly handsome, whether he was dressed in Indian clothes or in the latest Bond Street style. He was a millowner by birth, a millowner by profession and a millowner by adoption. He believed in the bright destiny of the cotton industry, and did not care what happened to the general prosperity of the workers, so long as his group of mills continued to pay handsome dividends. Not that he was heartless. It was simply a matter of second nature to him. Money and its progressive acquisition had become second nature during the long years of mill management.

By some members of the local federation of mill-owners he was regarded as a snob, not because he looked down upon them, but because he condescended to patronise them. He was not only a born millowner, but also an enterprising one, since he had actually quadrupled the properties left behind by his millowning father. The others were mere upstarts. They did not belong to the aristocracy of the federation. They had

acquired fortunes and become "managing agents" by dubious ways, such as forcing previous owners into liquidation, selling short weights in mill stores and sizing materials, palming off old machinery and scrap iron at exorbitant prices. They were gross, uncouth, and ill-mannered, and were not of his class. But since they possessed the necessary share holdings and had become "managing agents" he must accept them as members of the millowning fraternity and be gracious to them so as to secure their full support on matters of textile policy.

In one of his many trips to England, Seth Manilal Hirabhai had made the acquaintance of Horatio Johnbull Esq., M. P., and now having read press accounts of the distinguished M. P.'s travels in Northern India, he wrote a long letter requesting him to spend at least one week in Ahmedabad before his departure for Europe. He assured him that the visit would yield excellent results, and that Horatio Johnbull would have opportunities of studying the methods of the most formidable competitor of Lancashire.

Soon after the acceptance of the invitation, Seth Manilal made all haste to equip a specially selected suite of rooms in his palatial residence in Shahibag—an expensive locality where prosperous millowners, flourishing merchants and highly-paid Government officials reside. The swimming-pool was drained, cleaned and refilled with fresh water; the fountains were re-opened for the occasion; and electric bulbs were fixed in hidden sockets on the trees. Garden seats, artistically shaped into sofas from natural logs, were brushed and painted. The lawns were trimmed into floors of green velvet. Seth Manilal produced a miniature paradise in the very heart of a smoky industrial town.

On the 1st of April, at eight in the morning, Seth Manilal Hirabhai met the metre gauge mail from Delhi and received his honoured guests. In a brief speech in English, he welcomed Mrs. Johnbull to his humble home



and hoped that she would be quite comfortable during her stay in Ahmedabad. "I'm so happy to meet you once again," he said, addressing Horatio Johnbull.

He conducted his guests to his Rolls-Royce which was parked outside in the station compound, and drove straight away to Manilal Park, his well-known aristocratic residence.

Seth Manilal was soon able to impress his guests with the vastness of his intellectual hobbies. He had a well-stocked library on arts and sciences. He had an enviable collection of Mughal paintings and medieval crafts. Although he couldn't read a single word of the Persian script, he was proud of his wonderful collection of handwritten copies of Sa'adi, Hafiz and Firdausi, illuminated by some old artists of Iran. He could speak a few necessary sentences in French, and possessed expensive editions of Molière, Racine and Romain Rolland. He took childish delight in exhibiting his literary and artistic possessions to Cynthia Johnbull. He wanted to prove to her, not in words, but with deeds to witness, that the Indian millowner, in the person of Seth Manilal Hirabhai of Ahmedabad, was more intellectual and better informed than the scatter-brained British capitalist.

At breakfast cable, Horatio Johnbull was really surprised to see so much bookish culture in an Indian millowner. Seth Manilal was so flattered by the frequent complimentary references to himself that he assumed an attitude of apparent humility and explained that he was one of the very few acknowledged exceptions. He had the benefit of heredity, and being a born millowner, could easily afford to dabble in fine arts and detached appreciation of literature. The rest, he said, were just self-made parasites who couldn't get away from the eternal abomination of "bulling" and "bearing," manufacturing and selling.

## CHAPTER XL

### THE TEXTILE LORDS AND THEIR SLAVES

The cotton industry in Ahmedabad was historically old and technically senile. Like all other industries, it had received a considerable impetus during the brief boom following the termination of hostilities in Europe. But unlike other industries, it had squandered away its financial resources in the payment of large dividends and bonuses to its shareholders. And when the time for expansion and renovation came, it resorted to the installation of old looms and spinning frames discarded by Lancashire, "in good working condition". The said looms and the said spinning frames were nothing but junk purchased by middlemen and dishonest managing agents at four times the pre-war prices.

Millowners by birth, like Seth Manilal Hirabhai, were able to conserve their resources, and they added new and up-to-date machinery to their mills. There were others as well, not of the aristocratic class, but of the new industrial democracy, who were shrewd enough to go in for the latest types of spinning, weaving, dyeing and bleaching machinery. There was thus a peculiarly scattered crowd of young, aged and sinking mills, which could only be made to run at a profit owing to the decadent state of the Bombay mill industry and by doses of high tariffs against foreign goods.

In addition to the latter advantage, the millowners of Ahmedabad had their own secret methods of working, and their own mysterious ways of selling damaged dhories, defective bed sheets, highly sized shirtings and irregularly woven muslins. Even in the darkest days of depression when the margin between the cost of

production and the selling price was precariously narrow, they could manage to pay decent dividends.

In spite of profits, dividends, tariffs and the hoarded wealth of the millowners, the working classes laboured and lived in a strained atmosphere. Sanitary conditions and drainage in most of the mills continued to remain putrid. Housing conditions were appalling, and living accommodation for the textile workers and their families inadequate and unhygienic. The result of the heartless attitude of the textile lords towards the sufferings of the working classes was the formation of a powerful labour union with energetic and enthusiastic leaders.

The General Secretary, or in other words, the real motive force of the labour organisation was a young man by the name of Dayaram Chandani. He was also associated with the All-India Union of Industrial Workers, and in his capacity as a delegate, had paid frequent visits to other industrial centres, agitating for the rights of the mill-workers. Just a day before Horatio Johnbull's arrival, he received word from his colleague—comrade Manzoor Husain, requesting him to interview the distinguished member of the British Parliament. Dayaram at once realised that if he did not meet the M.P., the case of the textile workers would be sadly distorted by the millowner—Manilal Hirabhai with whom he was staying. He telephoned to Shahibag and made an appointment with Horatio Johnbull for Friday morning.

In an amiable but pushing manner, Dayaram introduced himself to Mr. and Mrs. Johnbull without reserve and formality. Seth Manilal was no doubt surprised at the quick action of the labour leader in seeking so early an interview; but he regarded this visit as a sort of compliment to himself.

Dayaram went straight to the object of his visit. "Allow me to assure you, Mr. Johnbull," he said, "that we have no personal grudge against Seth Manilal. We belong to opposite camps, but in private life, we

understand each other. I am anxious to show you our side of the picture, so that you may not be misled into believing that all is well with the poor workers."

"I'm very glad you've called on me, Mr. Dayaram," said Horatio Johnbull. "I should certainly like to see your side of the picture. But let me warn you that, from what I saw yesterday in Mr. Manilal's group of mills, I'm not inclined to believe that the conditions of the workers or of the mills are as bad as you depict."

"I must admit," said Dayaram "that the equipment of Mr. Manilal's mills is as good as any in Lancashire; but the internal management is as rotten as that of other mills in Ahmedabad and Bombay. And the working conditions of the workers are still worse. There is corruption and intrigue in every department. No spinner or weaver can retain his job without paying a monthly bribe to the jobber who wangled it for him. I shouldn't like to condemn the superior staff; but who knows where these bribes go in the long run?"

"I wouldn't go so far," observed Horatio Johnbull, "as to say that Mr Manilal's mills are perfect in detail. As regards intrigue and corruption, I'm not in a position to accept or reject your statements until I know something more about the technique of management in this country."

"There is no technique beyond the art of money-making by fair means or foul," answered Dayaram, as if he were disgusted with the very word "management." "You are not conversant with the methods of management in this country. A managing agent can make money in various ways, even if the shareholders get no dividend. By entering into secret partnerships or by registering subsidiary companies, they can easily swindle the shareholders, deprive the workers of their dues and hoodwink the Government in apparently legal ways. There is nothing in the law to prevent them from receiving commissions on purchases and sales. They are cunning enough to squeeze every ounce of blood out of the industry. When there is nothing left, they

rush to the Government in organised bodies and seek its protection in the shape of subsidies and import duties. This is their latest stunt, but it cuts no ice with the poor, half-starved worker who wants more *dál* and rice, and not increased doses of protection."

"If what you say is true," said Horatio Johnbull, "the whole system should be thoroughly overhauled. I was given to understand that the recent amendments in the Companies' Act were sufficiently stringent."

"The amendments are helpful to a certain extent," Dayaram admitted. "But they are not as drastic as they should have been. Moreover, they allow the existing managing agents to carry on their depredations for another twenty years. And Budha alone knows what is going to happen in the meantime."

"Let's get down to brass tacks and see some of your mills and half-starved slaves," suggested Horatio Johnbull, when the discussion was beginning to become more academic than real.

A whole day was spent in visiting cotton spinning and weaving establishments, and in walking through dyeing, bleaching and finishing sheds. Dayaram was careful enough to show only those pictures which depicted the difficulties of the working classes; such as old mills with rickety spinning frames and dangerously narrow spaces; weaving sheds with discarded looms and poor ventilation and lighting; perilous shaftings and so on.

In the majority of mills, the sanitary arrangements for the workers were so bad that even crows and vultures could smell the odours from their nesting places on the top of the boundary walls. There were no hospitals in the mills, nor was there efficient first-aid service. The workers were being worked to slow and languishing death at high speed and low wages. Their faces looked haggard and their bodies emaciated. The sheer desire to continue their wretched existence goaded them into the industrial field, and their lords and masters didn't care what happened to them after

they had finished their day's slaving. There were many more slaves available at still lower wages, as the supply of labour was abundant.

Their conditions of living were ghastly. There was utter lack of space in their homes and even the most rudimentary necessities of life. A small dark room, like a medieval chamber of torture, unfit for human habitation, formed the household accommodation for a trained and experienced weaver or spinner. Separate kitchens and bath-rooms were unknown in the workers' colonies. The tired worker had to come back to a bare floor in a dark room called his "home," or else go to the nearest liquor shop and drown his fatigue and sorrow in the crude poison supplied by the local contractor. This sort of life went on as long as the spinner or the weaver was able to retain his job at the mill. When the working of looms was reduced and the spinning of yarn cut down, he had to go back unemployed to his dingy and miserable lodging to mourn the loss of a day's wages.

Seth Manilal's eldest daughter, Pushpaben, took Cynthia out for a drive through the old city to the other side of Sabarmati. She showed her instructional centres where the "untouchables" were being touched and trained by the "touchables", and where different branches of the social work organised by the male and female members of the national group were being enlarged and developed. They also paid visits to the newly organised cultural institutions which had cropped up during the intensively national days of the non-co-operation movement. Cynthia was impressed with the various measures of social progress which the middle classes in Ahmedabad had adopted for the educational uplift of their members.

In the evening, Horatio Johnbull returned to Shahibag. Seth Manilal had already finished his day's work. He didn't believe in slaving himself to mental and physical fatigue. He generally left his home at 1 p.m. and returned at 5 p.m. after paying visits to his mills. He

believed in presiding over board meetings of banks, insurance companies, investment trusts and cotton mills. He was singularly gifted with verbosity, and at annual general meetings, he could always overcome the rowdy objections of the shareholders and assure them of a fat dividend next year. He left the executive management of his concerns to a batch of over-fed and bloated nephews who were supposed to carry on the noble traditions of the house of Hirabhais. And whatever was unmanageable he left to chance and intrigue, in the hope that, the petty-minded jealousies of the staff would create the necessary balancing force.

They were all sitting on the spacious velvety lawn sipping iced coffee through sterilised straws. Fountains were playing their murmuring music and sparrows were singing their parting songs in distant attics. Seth Manilal was in talkative and communicative mood. "Now tell me, Mr. Johnbull," he said, "how did you pass your day in the company of that firebrand—the great labour leader of our town?"

"Well, I don't know how to answer that question," said Horatio Johnbull after another few sips of iced coffee.

"Dayaram showed me three mills today—believed to be paying concerns. If these mills represent the average standard, I must say that the sooner they are scrapped the better. I can't understand why the Factory Inspectors don't interfere."

Seth Manilal smiled his usual benevolent smile, and said:

"I told you beforehand that our humanitarian friend would show you only the worst side of the picture. He is a specialist in presenting a few scattered instances of mismanagement and poverty and exaggerating minor grievances into major sufferings."

"There's no exaggeration in what I've seen with my own eyes," answered Horatio Johnbull, in a manner which clearly indicated that he was absolutely impartial in his views. "I really feel that the Government should

ratify all the conventions adopted by the International Labour Conference at Geneva."

"My dear Mr. Johnbull," replied Seth Manilal, "you have obtained only a glimpse of the real situation. You should go deeper into the problems of our industry before recommending the application of international standards to Indian conditions. We cannot accept such proposals as the fixation of minimum wages, the reduction of working hours and the compulsory insurance of workers. Our labour is inefficient and migratory, and if we were to reduce our working hours still further, we should be cutting our throats with the international safety razor."

"I entirely disagree with you on these points," said Horatio Johnbull with emphasis. "You've chosen to introduce mass production on international lines. You're facing international competition with the aid of highly mechanised methods. That being so, you've no right to reject the principles of labour reform adopted by an international organisation in which your own representatives have as much say as the others. My dear friend, if the removal of evils were left to capitalists, the workers would never see ease and comfort. Legislation is necessary. Your operatives receive ridiculously low wages, and their conditions of living are miserable. It's in the interests of the mill industry to pay higher wages, provide better facilities, and enable the masses to purchase more."

So far Seth Manilal had been under the impression that the discussion was of an academic nature. Now he realised that the views expressed by Horatio Johnbull were likely to be accepted as truths from a man who had studied the situation on the spot. He at once made up his mind to present his side of the picture.

"In the first place," he said thoughtfully, "I must point out that the wages earned by our weavers and spinners are, in some cases, much higher than those earned by young graduates of Bombay University. In the second place, during the last ten years, the position



of the millowners has been made more difficult by laws and regulations. Our production has suffered and we are unable to compete with imported goods dumped into India. And in the third place, textile labour is being organised everywhere by outside leaders whose interest lies in strikes and deadlocks. If militant trade unionism is not checked in time, I am afraid we shall have to face the same scenes as are faced by our friends in England and America. We must learn our lessons from your country and stop all encroachments upon our rights and privileges as millowners and promoters of the most important industry in the whole country."

"I appreciate your point of view, Mr. Manilal," said Horatio Johnbull, "but I doubt if you'll succeed in stopping trade unionism. You've travelled all over the world and must have seen that a continued process of democratization is going on. The capitalist in India should realise that his strength lies in appreciating the hardships of his workers, and not in paying out fat dividends and piling up fortunes. Take my friendly advice; move with the times and cheerfully accept the principles of the democratic age."

Mrs. Manilal, Pushpaben and Cynthia were listening to this dry discussion without expressing opinions. The evening was casting its dark shadows on the velvety lawn. The air was getting cooler and cooler. Without coming to any definite conclusions, the millowner and the politician drifted into casual social talk. Seth Manilal suggested a swim in the swimming-pool before dinner and the informal conference ended in the donning of swimming costumes.

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE TEMPLE OF NATIONAL DISCIPLINE

The next four days of the first week of April were memorable for Horatio Johnbull and his wife. The latter had only superficially studied the problems of Indian nationalism during the lifetime of her father, but during these days she had opportunities of gazing into the National Mirror with greater clearness and sympathy. Her husband also was brought into closer contact with the realities of the Indian situation, and learnt more about the widespread national spirit in these four days than during the previous four months.

In spite of filth and squalor, industrial snobbery and commercial heartlessness, poverty and degradation, religious bigotry and ritual slavery—in spite of all these evils, there was something in Ahmedabad and its people that could not be surpassed by other towns in India. It was the national spirit of the age, the awakening of a new political consciousness which went to the very hearts of the people. It was a feeling of mental independence which directed the energies of a whole nation to patriotic ideals and self-imposed sacrifices.

It was clear to Horatio Johnbull that the middle classes in particular had acted *en masse* in shaking off the shackles of social and political bondage. Leaving aside the aristocratic order of millowners, the bureaucratic order of Government officials and the unnamed order of toadies, sycophants and bootlickers, the rest of the population formed a solid block of non-co-operating resisters who followed, without a murmur, the directions of the famous Sage of Sabarmati, and placed

themselves unreservedly at the disposal of the High Command.

Personal discussions with men and women who had been through the national struggle and frequent visits to educational and cultural institutions made a deep impression on Horatio Johnbull's mind. He discovered that, unlike Bombay, Calcutta and Lahore, Gujerat in general, and Ahmedabad in particular had been disciplined into a life of rigorous simplicity. Garments tailored out of hand-spun and hand-woven Khaddar were proudly worn by the masses as well as by the intelligentsia. Since everybody believed in buying Indian cloth and wearing Indian clothes, the sartorial fashions of Western countries were conspicuous by their absence.

Even those people who had spent several years in Europe had come back to a simple form of living. There was something really charming about their subdued simplicity which preserved certain ancient ideals without destroying the effect and usefulness of modern education and foreign travel.

On Sunday evening, Horatio Johnbull met Kapilashanker Jagmohandas, the intellectual leader of the left wing of the national group, at a function organised by the President of the local municipality. Kapilashanker was a hardened ascetic who had given up all forms of luxury under the guidance of the Sage. Although fairly advanced in years, he did not look sixty. There was a glow in his light brown face and a sparkle in his yogic eyes. His bald head looked as if he were accustomed to shaving it every day along with his beard and moustache. He was perfectly cleanshaven from his neck to the top of his shining pate. Slim and wiry in appearance, tall and majestic in height, he looked as if he had no care in the world.

Kapilashanker greeted Horatio Johnbull in a very cordial manner. In his unimpeachable English, he welcomed the honoured guest. "I'm very glad," he said slowly, "that you could spare a few days to visit our historical city. I only hope that your worthy host

has not prejudiced your mind against our national work."

"My mind is not easily prejudiced," replied Horatio Johnbull. "Mr. Manilal has been very patient with me, and I'm grateful to him for his hospitality, and for the valuable information he has given me on economic nationalism and capitalism in India."

"What's your general impression about the present political situation in our country?" enquired Kapilashanker.

"It's very difficult to give out general impressions," answered Horatio Johnbull hesitantly. "I may, however, say that there's a widespread political and social awakening in India. There's, as it were, a bubbling desire for independence."

"Our goal is clear," said the divisional leader of the National Mirror. "We want complete independence without shedding a single drop of blood. We want a rigorously simplified system of living. We want complete prohibition. We want social and sexual purity. And above all, we want economic nationalism to build up our agriculture and industries, and to free us from the commercial domination of the foreigner."

"Your ambitions are noble indeed," observed Horatio Johnbull thoughtfully; "but in actual practice, I'm afraid, you'll find difficulties. For instance, complete prohibition is difficult to enforce. What happened in America will happen here. Apart from the expense involved in the suppression of racketeers and bootleggers, you'll have to deal with a bumper crop of crime which usually arises from prohibition laws."

"But we can't allow the poor people to poison their bodies with alcohol and starve their wives and children," argued the national leader. •

"You can't make one set of laws for the poor and another set for the rich," answered Horatio Johnbull. "Moreover, if a poor worker chooses to drown his miseries in a glass of beer, you've no right to penalise him and let a rich man who gets drunk in a public place

and makes a perfect fool of himself go scotfree."

"Under conditions of complete prohibition, no one will be allowed to go scotfree if he breaks the law," said Kapilashanker vigorously. "And further, let me assure you Mr. Johnbull that your American analogy doesn't apply to India. We must try the experiment and watch the results. In my opinion, prohibition will also improve the sexual morals of our people."

"What's wrong with the sexual morals of your people?" asked Horatio Johnbull impatiently. "Surely you don't want to turn out a generation of ascetics suffering from all sorts of repressions and indulging in all sorts of unnatural vices. I've met all grades of men and women in India, and I must say that they seemed to be normally healthy people with healthy sexual inclinations. If you carry this joke of sexual purity too far, you'll find yourself landed in a mess. There'll be opposition from the younger generation who do not want their normal impulses interfered with by aged saints and yogis."

"But my dear Sir!" said the eminent leader, "we're not forcing a moral code on the people. We're simply preaching continence, a form of sexual self-restraint which every civilised citizen in a civilised state must exercise for the welfare of the present generation and generations to come."

"Continence directed or inspired by religious enthusiasm or political leadership becomes a sort of fetish in the long run; a form of mechanical brake on the normal sexual urges of young people which leads either to socio-sexual revolution or to increased homosexuality. And God help your nation if, by any chance, homosexuality becomes a fashionable form of sex indulgence. Instead of purity, you'll have a putrid moral disease which will be ten times worse than the original remedy."

Kapilashanker was nonplussed by this argument, though, like a good debating lawyer, he wouldn't admit his confusion. Deviating from the central line of the

theme, he said: "In our programme of rigorous simplicity, we must insist upon a drastic reduction of physical wants, and sex being an unhealthy appetite, must also be curtailed as far as possible."

"You might as well advise the people to go without wheat and rice and sugar and even clothes," said Horatio Johnbull, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "And in that case, your economic nationalism and your industrial programme will fall to pieces. Industries flourish only when people increase their purchasing power. Agriculture thrives only when people consume the produce of the land. Rigorous simplicity and drastic reduction in physical wants will deal a death-blow to industrial and agricultural prosperity. In this age of international competition your rigorous simplicity will defeat the very purpose for which it has been designed."

"It seems to me," said Kapilashanker with some agitation, "that you've not gone to the root of the Indian problem. Our problem is very simple. Let's assume for the sake of argument that a villager produces one maund of jowar or bajra in the season and keeps half a maund for himself and his family. Let's further assume that he exchanges the balance for a piece of loin cloth, a shirt, and a turban. Since he has no further physical wants to worry about, he is immune from the fluctuations in the exchange value of other commodities. As three-fourths of our entire population is agricultural we can easily solve the major economic problem by making our villagers self-sufficient."

"I don't pretend to know much about Indian economics," said Horatio Johnbull, "but I'm sure that the solution is not so simple as you make out. Leaving aside such items as land tax, water rates and other charges, I can't believe for a moment that your excellent villager is an isolated human being unconnected with the rest of the world. His ability to exchange the balance half of his produce will naturally vary with the

exchange value of the goods he barter for. At times, he may have to give up the whole maund and starve for the rest of the season, or retain half a maund and go without a covering during the winter. No, my dear friend, it's not so simple as you imagine. The whole problem is fraught with endless difficulties and it'd take a long time even for your party to find a satisfactory solution."

"If we are given power without interference, I'm sure we shall be in a position to carry out a constructive programme," said Kapilashanker in a reassuring voice.

Horatio Johnbull expressed the pious hope that the national group would decide in favour of office acceptance. "If there's no international conflict in which India is likely to be involved," he said, "I'm sure there'll be no interference from Whitehall in your administrative affairs. You should make up your minds to face the realities of the situation and prove to the world that you're fully capable of managing your own affairs."

Kapilashanker brooded over the last sentence for some time, and then asked a direct question: "Mr. Johnbull, would it be convenient for you to address a gathering of men and women of all castes and creeds in Bombay before your departure for England? We should deem it a great favour if you could let the country have your considered views on the present situation."

"I wouldn't like to make a definite promise," replied Horatio Johnbull, "as I'm not sufficiently qualified to speak on so controversial a subject. My friend Azadali and his colleagues have often made similar requests, but so far I've replied in the negative. I may however change my mind later on."

The President of the Municipality was annoyed with Kapilashanker for having monopolised Horatio Johnbull during the whole evening. He came along to the sofa with other leading lights of the national

movement and introduced them to the guest of honour. The conversation drifted from one topic to another and finally ended in pleasant farewells.

Ahmedabad had no orgiastic dinners or cocktail parties to offer, no seductive dances or pantomimes. Fortunately, the rigorous simplicity of life preached by the leaders and practised by the people, did not exclude strong tea or pure Indian coffee. There was therefore no alcoholic pressure forced on the distinguished member of the British Parliament and his newly-wedded wife. An atmosphere of homely hospitality greeted them wherever they went, and within a short space of one week, they gathered as much information as was available within the four corners of the second important textile centre in India.

Pushpaben earnestly requested Cynthia to spend another week with her people in their magnificent house in Mount Abu. Seth Manilal himself made similar entreaties to Horatio Johnbull. But in spite of these repeated requests, Mr. and Mrs. Johnbull left for Bombay, en route to England, on Friday, the 9th of April by the Kathiawar-Bombay mail in the midst of profuse farewell greetings and honest regrets.





**PART SEVEN**  
**MR. JOHNBULL SPEAKS OUT**



## CHAPTER XLII

### MR. JOHNBULL SPEAKS OUT

The sweltering hot weather had already commenced its enervating sway in the island of Bombay. Boatloads of liverish millionaires were leaving for London and the Continent every week. Large crowds of official and unofficial visitors were making elaborate preparations for the forthcoming Coronation. The atmosphere was hot and steamy, not only with the surcharged humidity of the air, but also with the human energy generated by the hustling crowds of departing princes and their huge retinues.

Fortunately, Horatio Johnbull was able to secure a suite at the Mumtaz Mahal Hotel. Curiously enough, it was the same which he had occupied as a bachelor on his arrival in India. Cynthia was delighted with it and its proximity to a beautiful dark blue seascape. It carried sweet memories within its walls. It was a perfect haven of peace for her.

Soon after his return to Bombay, Horatio Johnbull found himself surrounded by a host of journalists, reporters, political agents and representatives of party organisations—both Indian and European. By shrewd and rude tactics, he managed to get out of the clutches of the reporters; but he couldn't escape the party spokesmen. Azadali and Indumati had already returned to headquarters and they were now pestering him with requests for a public speech. Their requests were supported by Jal Feroz and other members of the socialist party. Sir Cursetji Todibacha, with his usual affability, had also called to offer his "heartly congratulations" to the married couple and his profound respects to the

lucky bride. Sir Timothy Warburton, the pillar of European commerce, spared no pains in persuading Horatio Johnbull to give India the benefit of his views on the burning questions of the day. Even the constructively inclined Mayor of Bombay had joined the chorus of requests for a public speech.

At long last, Horatio Johnbull yielded to this unremitting cannon fire of requests, and agreed to address a gathering at the Liberty Hall on Friday at 5 p.m.—just a day before his departure for England.

The Liberty Hall was the only edifice in the whole of India which was designed, constructed, furnished and equipped as a permanent memorial to the unquestioned triumph of the non-violent political movement. It was a truly national structure. Every brick and every piece of stone, every beam and every stanchion, every ton of cement and lime used in its construction, every slab of marble placed in its facade, every plank of wood used in its panelling, and every bit of brass screwed in its massive doors were purchased from the funds contributed by the citizens of Bombay. It was a house of free speech and free thought, and even the so-called liberals were allowed to use its huge platform to air their pro-imperial views. It was indeed a temple of toleration. It faced the west on the recently reclaimed grounds of the Marine Drive, and received the western sea breezes carrying with them messages of slavery and freedom, warfare and peace, international jealousies and colonial ambitions.

Although Horatio Johnbull's speech on the Indian Tangle was arranged at short notice, the English-knowing public in Bombay, Poona and other political centres, rushed down to the Hall to listen to the words of the distinguished member of the British Parliament. The Liberty Hall was crammed with people; there was not even standing room. Men and women of all possible schools of thought, students and scholars, nationalists and socialists, liberals and swarajists appeared in the Hall in their light picturesque costumes. Even the

whole-hoggers who stood for complete independence gathered there. British commercial interests were represented by the Burra Sahibs of the leading mercantile houses, while Indian capital was to the forefront with its eternal grievances and its unceasing demands for protection.

The labour leaders did not miss the opportunity either. They were anxious to hear something about their own cause. Ardent birth-controllers were also there to see that the speaker did not fail to make reference to the necessity of putting a strong brake on the ever-growing population of the country. The recently-elected women legislators formed a small group of their own and occupied front seats in the left wing of the Hall. It was impossible to classify the audience in further detail, as anybody and everybody who was interested, even remotely, in the political problems of India found space for himself in the Liberty Hall.

The chair was occupied by the well-known Muslim leader, Mr. Insafali Kurbani who, in spite of his denominational leadership, was held in high esteem by all classes of political workers. A tall handsome man, well over fifty years of age, he had a pleasantly aggressive personality. His sculptured features and his inimitable monocle added to the natural charm of his fluent speech and impressive manners. His long streaks of grey hair brushed back over the wide forehead looked more like a theatrical wig than a real head of natural hair. Being tolerant in religious views and broad-minded in social outlook, he commanded the respect and admiration of all his Hindu and Muslim friends. He was as zealous about Swaraj as any leader of the national group. As he was impressed with the press accounts of Horatio Johnbull's Indian visit, he had consented to preside over the public meeting.

In glowing terms, Mr. Insafali Kurbani introduced the speaker of the evening to the audience. He told them that Mr. Horatio Johnbull had consented, after great reluctance, to give them his views before his

departure for Europe.

In the midst of cheers, Horatio Johnbull rose from his chair, and bowing slightly towards the Chairman's table began his speech. Silence soon prevailed throughout the Hall, where nearly five thousand people listened with anxious interest. The fine accoustic qualities of the Hall enabled most of the hearers to hear the clear voice. It was not the sonorous voice of a professional politician, nor the shrill harangue of a Hyde Park orator, nor the soft voice of a melodramatic actor. It was the deep vibrant voice of a man who was naturally gifted with fluency of thought and speech. It rang out impressively and left its hearers in no doubt as to the speaker's mind.

He began in the usual formal way. "Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, "under ordinary circumstances, I would have declined to express my views on so baffling a subject as the 'Indian Tangle'; but having been fortunate in coming into direct contact with all shades of opinion in all parts of India, I think I'm justified in throwing aside my reserve on this particular occasion. I hope my outspoken reading of the present situation and my friendly criticism will not be misinterpreted by the people of this country."

There was a brief pause. Horatio Johnbull looked around and assured himself that his words were creating an atmosphere of serious attention in the Hall. He resumed his speech.

"The first observation that I wish to make this evening is that, throughout the whole of India, or at any rate in those parts that I've visited, there's a manifestation of that which has been so often described as 'national consciousness', a sort of mass awakening from a long political slumber. This consciousness, or whatever you might call it, is the first step towards that ultimate goal which you all cherish and strive for—the goal of national freedom. In many respects, 'this widespread national movement is admirable, but some' of its features are regrettable. One of these is the

tendency to make a political hobby of accusing the ruling nation of all sorts of diabolical acts, such as, the wilful exploitation of the masses and revenues of this country. In fairness to my own countrymen, I must make an attempt to explain the unfairness of the charges of exploitation.

"Most of you are familiar with the circumstances which drove us to the shores of this great country. Originally we came to the Western Coast as a trading community. The pepper trade of Leadenhall Street and the Dutch monopoly of Eastern commerce were responsible for the adventures of our early merchant mariners. Even in the later stages, there was no intention on the part of the East India Company to assume the administration of this country. Through a series of flukes and accidents the Crown was compelled to take over the reins of Government from the Agents of the Company, and in 1858 the original trading community became a *de facto* ruling community.

"In the very nature of things, it was necessary to continue what you describe as 'commercial exploitation', and what we call exclusive 'trading rights'. But you should give the trading devils their due and acknowledge that, in less than twenty years, they invited you to take your seats in the Central Council and to share in local self-government. Your own people were, however, beginning to acquire the art of exploitation, and in their desire to amass fortunes they rushed madly to the doors of speculative markets and neglected politics and administration. It seems strange, but it's true all the same that an Englishman drew the attention of your leaders to the necessity of forming an All-India National Organisation, which has grown into gigantic proportions within half a century.

"I shall now come back to my starting-point. Assuming that there was some justification for the British to indulge in exploitation, what earthly justification is there for your own people to imitate us and to out-herod Herod himself? The exploitation of the



Indian worker by the Indian capitalist, or the ruination of the Indian cultivator by the Indian landowner and money-lender, is no less staggering and brutal than that of the British. The process of denuding the masses of their possessions is the same in both cases ; it's perhaps a bit more intensive in your own case."

There were cries of "Shame, shame" from the left-wingers, and shouts of "No, no" from the office managers of Indian and European business firms.

"Please don't interrupt me," said Horatio Johnbull loudly. "I wish to prove," he continued, "that the charge of exploitation against my countrymen comes loudest from those who are themselves ruthless exploiters.

"The initial evil started when you gave up your own methods, and commenced borrowing blindly, from our industrial systems. You cannot deny that your textile industries, your insurance concerns, your banks, your chemical factories and almost all other organised industries, were established on the lines of the British pioneers. You've shown neither initiative nor originality. The primary risks were borne by other people. You've followed the lines of least resistance and maximum profit.

"I hold no brief for our industrialists, nor do I approve of some of their methods, but I do say that neither British nor Indian business men are engaged in missions of charity. They are all alike in the worship of the Bitch Goddess, and since human offerings form an essential part of the ritual, human beings must continue to be exploited at the altar of the money deity. In the exploitation of the peasants and workers of India, your own capitalists and landowners have marched hand in hand with the British.

"There is, however, this difference between your form of exploitation and ours. You've allowed yours to degenerate into family monopolies, known in this country as 'Managing Agencies.' In your case, the accident of birth is a qualification for industrial

exploitation, whereas in our case, energy and initiative are the chief requisites for a successful career. Efficiency, pluck in commercial battles and industrial management, are not inherited qualities which only the sons and nephews of Managing Agents can possess. They can be acquired by able young men who are out to reach the top of the ladder. You've driven hundreds of honest young men with talent out of the market by allowing wealth to drift into the hands of a small body of useless idlers who will, sooner or later, squander away their fortunes on personal pleasures and let the industries under their control die an unnatural death.

"I think I've discussed the question of exploitation at sufficient length. I shall now turn to the development of political parties in this country.

"There are three main schools of political thought in this country at present.

"The first is what is commonly described as the 'liberal' school. I don't know why it's called by that fancy name. As a political creed, liberalism is in a senile state in most of the civilised countries of the world. But in India, it's still flourishing under the patronage of the liberal party whose chief aim seems to be the continuation of the British connection and the achievement of Dominion Status through the working of the New Constitution. While sympathising with the ambitions of the liberals and endorsing some of their views, I can't help saying that their programme doesn't go far enough towards reform. It's not bold enough at this point of India's history. It demands Dominion Status without realising that conditions obtaining in Canada or in Australia are vastly different from those obtaining in India, where the insularity of social and religious groups is still a stumbling block in the path of advance.

"There are other weak links in liberalism, and one of them is the presence in the party of millionaires, financiers, millowners, successful lawyers and lucky stockbrokers, who are definitely opposed to the

redistribution of wealth on a more equitable basis. Another weak link is their reluctance to pay for the cost of protection and self-government. They want immunity from foreign attack and safety from internal strife, they want a wider franchise and a larger legislature, but they don't want to pay additional taxes for these. Theirs is a cheap form of patriotism which demands much but gives very little in return."

Some of the knighted liberals of Bombay were distressed at these remarks. A youthful supporter of the central financial gang, shouted out: "There's nothing unpatriotic in placing our trust in your countrymen."

Horatio Johnbull paid no attention to this interruption. He went on:

"The second school is the National Mirror, which reflects the views of a vast majority of your people today. Distinctly different in form, though somewhat similar in aims and ambitions, is the Muslim group. I place both these groups under a single category and call it the Indian National Group. This school doesn't believe in mincing matters. It openly declares for complete independence. It has achieved phenomenal success in creating a collective spirit of self-sacrifice, and in awakening the bulk of the masses from a deep slumber. It has given the people a feeling of self-respect and a distant vision of national freedom, and no man with a grain of sense, would deny the tremendous influence of this group.

"And now let us see if there are any flaws or drawbacks in the ideal of complete independence. It seems to me that no one in the group is clear as to how the nation is going to achieve freedom. Those of you who're familiar with the recent movements in Europe, must be aware that political freedom is not a gift which can be won by soul force. If soul force alone were enough to free India from bondage, India would have been an independent nation long ago. So long as the bulk of the population remains desperately poor, and

capitalism reigns supreme, political freedom will continue to be a fiction.

"Now assume, for the sake of argument, that all goes well with the national movement and that, at some point in history independence is achieved. The next question to consider is: How to preserve that independence and how to protect the nation against attacks of foreign powers with superior forces? It has always been fashionable for strong nations to attack the weaker ones, and it has always been regarded as eminently patriotic on the part of fully armed nations to seek colonial expansion under the cloak of humanitarian motives. And as no effective formula has yet been devised to do away with war, the only way of preserving national independence is to create formidable naval, military and aerial barriers against the aggressors.

"Those of you who've had experience in the organisation of national defences and also those who've handled questions of public finance, will admit that these problems are not quite so simple as they're believed to be by the left-wingers of the national movement. I've heard that the protagonists of complete independence believe in the providential help of some unnamed foreign power. I wish to impress upon my friends of the national movement that the sympathies of foreigners for India are purely selfish and superficial. Recent events in Africa and China have demonstrated the utter futility of placing reliance in such altruists. An independent nation in distress must depend upon her own resources or on the strength of those with whom they've had associations of long standing, such as those between India and England.

"I shall now deal with the glaring fallacy of the programme of the national party. On the one hand, they demand the cutting down of human wants and return to conditions of nudity and nature, and on the other, they insist upon the development of heavy industries, and industrial self-sufficiency. How can these two poles be brought together? If I were an economic

adviser to the party, I should say: 'Raise the income of the masses, improve their conditions of living so that even the humblest farmer is able to provide himself with two square meals a day and some necessary comforts of life.' Industries, whether light or heavy, cannot flourish unless there's a demand for the goods they produce.

"The third school of political thought is a conglomeration of conflicting ideals. It has subdivisions, such as syndicalism, socialism, fascism and communism. But I shall call the third school by the name of National Socialism. The number of young men taking up this form of socialism as a practical creed is fast increasing. The desire for the application of socialistic and dictatorial methods arises from the poverty of the masses and the lower middle classes, as well as from the strain and hardships of unemployment. Intelligent young men and women feel the economic pinch and the social pin-pricks, and they're out to right the wrongs done to them by the Indo-British overlords of commerce. I do feel that, if the present attitude of the upper classes towards social reform persists for another ten years, there'll be an overwhelming majority of socialists in the political field.

"At this point, I wish to make it quite clear that, while admitting the negation of individual freedom under National Socialism, I'm not condemning wholesale the forms of Government which some countries in Europe have evolved in recent years. I'm fully aware that they have achieved national unity and harmony, and that they have righted certain international wrongs, and have even built up massive armaments under the cloak of nationalism. But all the same I feel that those forms would not suit the present requirements of your country.

"India is still a land of extremes. Side by side with extreme luxury one finds appalling poverty and gnawing hunger. Side by side with great learning one finds utter ignorance and illiteracy. Side by side with

city palaces and towering structures, there are roofless huts and squalid hamlets. Side by side with natural grandeur and wonderful landscapes, one finds barren rocks and dreamy wilderness. Side by side with high spiritual attainments one finds charlatanry and religious fraud. And so on ad infinitum.

"And in the midst of all these extremes, one finds the untainted frankness of youth, an unswerving loyalty to certain ideals; a sight which brings forth hope for the future. I've had some very sweet and pleasant experiences of personal contact with young men and women seeking a solution of the problems burning in their young minds. I could see that, inspite of their optimism about the future, they were unhappy at heart. They had a grudge against the older generation. Religion, they told me, was not a spiritual force. It was the last weapon in the hands of fanatics who were out to gain economic ends through the religious beliefs held by different sections of the nation. If the impressions left in my mind are correct, I'm sure there's something wrong with this transition period. All over the country, there's a crying need for the removal of hideous differences and opposite extremes. Those of you who're now passing into old age must realise that India is on the threshold of a new social revolution, and if you place impediments in the path you'll only hasten your end."

There were cheers from all parts of the Hall. There were also murmurs from hoary-headed reformers and incorrigible puritans.

Turning towards the Chairman, Horatio Johnbull said: "Do forgive me for this digression." After this apology, he faced the audience once again and resumed his speech.

"Some of the extremes could have been rectified long ago. Illiteracy could have been swept away by compulsory education. Poverty and roofless huts could have been driven away by a call upon the colossal incomes of the moneyed classes. The evils of child

marriage could have been removed by the enforcement of stringent laws. Charlatanry and quackery could have been destroyed by rigorous measures.

"The curious habit of putting the cart before the horse all over India has resulted in colossal waste of money and man power, and I sincerely hope that, those who come into political power henceforth will not follow in the footsteps of their predecessors and repeat their mistakes."

Two Indians and one European sitting in the front row indicated by gestures that they should like to have his constructive suggestions. After a brief pause, Horatio Johnbull continued his speech.

"I think it's physically impossible for me to give you even the barest outline of a really constructive programme. It's a task on which some of the best brains of our country spent over seven years. After a careful examination of all the conditions, they produced one of the most elaborate documents of our time - the Government of India Act 1935. If that document failed to satisfy your demands, how can my suggestions meet with your approval? The only advice I can give you is to accept the power conferred upon you by the New Constitution and go ahead with such reforms as are possible under the changed circumstances. As a sincere friend of your country I feel that the opportunities offered can be turned into effective avenues of progress. In spite of its limitations, in spite of its drawbacks, the New Constitution is a stepping-stone to that form of democratic nationalism which, in my opinion, India will ultimately adopt as a practical political creed.

"Hitherto the greatest good of the greatest number has been brutally sacrificed for the maximum luxury of the minimum number, or in other words, vested interests have been protected at the expense of the masses. It's not easy to dispossess the possessing classes of their wealth. It's not easy to take away the privileges of the privileged classes. It takes a long time to remove maladjustments and still longer to establish equilibrium

between the different sections of the population. When the majority party in the Indian National Group take over the responsibility of ministerial office, they would do well to devote the first five years to the detailed study of the various problems staring them in the face.

"I would like you all to give up the habit of saying that India is the poorest country in the world and that Indians are a nation of slaves. Even if you base your humiliating claim on statistics, India is *not* the poorest country in the world. There are two main factors which make the bulk of the population hopelessly poor. The first is the extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, and the second is the immobility of treasure and minerals lying hidden in the bowels of the earth. A thousand million pounds worth of diamonds, pearls, emeralds and bullion concentrated in the hands of say ten people must necessarily affect the earning and spending powers of a million human beings. Tap that wealth by legislation, and you'll never talk of poverty again.

"Similarly, there's no sense in repeating that you are slaves, for you're not. You may be slaves to your religion, to your customs, to your cultural institutions, to your historical traditions, and even to the beauty and charm of your national arts. There's nothing contemptible in these forms of slavery. We're always shaking off one form of slavery and replacing it by another. Politically speaking, you're not slaves, you're partners in the new administration, and with the march of time you'll become masters of the situation. It's a bad habit to call political partnership by the ugly name of slavery."

("Hear, hear," from all parts of the Hall. "Well said", shouted the back-benchers).

"You ask me if I can give you some practical suggestions. There's no cut-and-dried scheme, nor any Russian 'Five Years' Plan' in my mind, for I do *not* believe in these logically laid-out schemes. A series of inconsistencies can only be removed by another series



of inconsistencies. And the only way of making an inconsistent beginning is, as I've said before, to snatch the power that is given to you and start a general stock-taking of the present position, with a view to liquidating your unhealthy past. Remember that the possession of one power leads to other powers.

"The first concern of the state should be the welfare of the agricultural classes. Everyone knows that the cultivator in this country has to bear unbearable debt; his holdings are miserably small; and he has no capital for development. Remove these handicaps, but not by starting demonstration farms, expensive agricultural colleges, ornamental agricultural committees and boards.

"Similarly, in the case of industries, apply the axe and cut down all forms of commercial corruption and monopolies. Since industry is a combination of three factors, namely, capital, labour and scientific technique, it's absolutely necessary to look after all the factors. Railways and road transport, electricity and water works, telephones and aerial communications, etc., should be nationalised during the first period of the new administration. If this is achieved, the nationalisation of the 'key industries,' such as iron and steel, cement and concrete, the manufacture of cellulose, petroleum and explosives of all kinds, should present lesser difficulties in the second and third stages of the new administration.

"Another interesting question arises out of the discussion. Some people have told me that capital is very shy in this country. Why? Because the capitalist, like a Pathan money-lender, expects, cent per cent return on his outlay. Your insurance companies should be made to find several millions of idle surpluses every year for industrial reconstruction. The mathematical laws of life insurance are infallible. Reserves must continue to grow under sound management and there must always be unwanted surplus for national industrial risks. Follow the American and Canadian examples and build up huge national industries from

the nation's own financial resources. Don't ridicule me if I tell you that, with a proper campaign of mobilisation, you could easily get together a hundred million pounds for the requirements of industrial reconstruction.

"Another aspect of economic life to which I should like to draw your attention is the rapidity with which the habit of gambling is spreading in every nook and corner of India. This habit is nothing but an extension of the organised system of speculation legally allowed in all possible avenues of commerce in Europe and America and also in this country. Fortunes are made suddenly by ordinary merchants and brokers and their examples are followed by their servants who rush to the nearest betting shop and sink their petty savings in 'American futures.' Since gambling is ingrained in human nature, it's almost impossible to abolish it altogether by a legislative measure or by a series of police prosecutions. Under these circumstances, the most practical method of dealing with market gambling is to place all speculative incomes under the category of 'unearned income' and to tax them on a much higher scale.

"I have already gone far beyond the original scope of my speech. I would therefore prefer to leave the rest of my suggestions to financial experts who, I've no doubt, would discover endless ways of balancing your national budget. My personal contacts and inferences encourage me to believe that, if your leaders and administrators do not succumb to the voluptuousness of political power, you will be able to readjust your social and economic differences in less than thirty years. Solve the problems of production and distribution, both industrial and agricultural; abolish poverty and social snobbery; and then the new nation will move on smoothly towards the goal of prosperity. I do hope that, during my own lifetime, an independent and prosperous India will occupy a place of honour in the Central Council of the British Empire.

"Good-bye and many thanks for the patience and

attention with which you've listened to my long but, I hope, not too boring speech."

There was uproarious cheering from all parts of the Hall. There was ceaseless clapping of hands and waving of hats. The students shouted out: "Good old Johnbull; he's a jolly good fellow." The Chairman called the audience to order and in a brief speech thanked the speaker of the evening for his admirable analysis of the situation and his outspoken comments on the problems of the day.

Somewhere in the Indian Ocean, not very far from the cosmopolitan port of Bombay, the "*Inconia*" was rushing towards her Western destination through the dashing waves of a high sea. It was the evening of Saturday, the 17th of April, 1937. The sun was just descending into the immeasurable space of the universe, beyond the sea and the sky was turning into a mixture of golden, crimson and orange hues. On the top deck, leaning against a polished brass rail, stood the newly married couple watching the fading orb of the setting sun.

For some time, Horatio Johnbull gazed dreamily into the slowly darkening space, and then, moved by the vastness of sea and sky about him, he turned round to Cynthia and holding her hands in his own said: "Cynthia darling, are you happy?"

"I'm more than happy," replied Cynthia promptly. "Horatio darling," she added, "I'm so proud of you. Your speech was simply wonderful. The ancient country we are leaving behind is seeking a new destiny. May it be as lucky in that search as I have been with the man I love."









